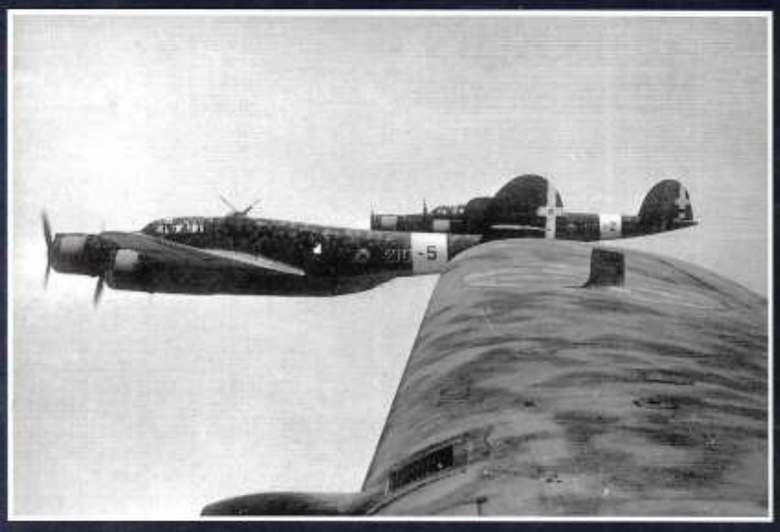
STATO MAGGIORE AERONAUTICA
UFFICIO STORICO

NINO ARENA

LA REGIA AERONAUTICA
1939 - 1943

VOLUME SECONDO

1941
L'ANNO DELLA RISCOSSA



ROMA 1982

AIR FORCE GENERAL STAFF
OFFICAL HISTORY

NINO ARENA

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

1939 - 1943

SECOND VOLUME

1941
THE YEAR OF THE RESCUE

ROME 1982[1]

1

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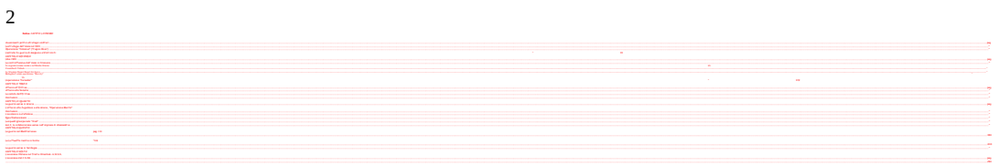

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Insert Pages

Abbreviations used in the text of this series

-A-
A.C.I.T. = Corpo d'Armata Italiano e Tedesco (Army Corps Italian & German) (ex D.A.K. or Africa Corps)
Aeralba (contraction of the service of Air Force Command Albania)
AGI = [unsure likely a misprint in the book] Italian Greater Africa
AI = Air Interception (Radar)
AOI = Africa Orientale Italiana (Italian East Africa)
A.P.C. = Aviazione Presidio Coloniale (Colonial Garrison Aviation)
A.R.P. = (Aircraft Replacement Pool)
ASV = Radar, Air-to-Surface Vessel
A.S. = Aero siluri [Aerial torpedo]
A.S. = Africa Settentrionale (North Africa)
A.S.C. = (Air Support Control units)
A.S.I. = Africa Settentrionale Italiana (Italian North Africa)
A.S.P. = (Air Storage Park)
Aviatsya Polk = Russian for air regiment
A.V.P. = Aviazione Vigilanza Presidiaria (Garrison Aviation Supervision)
AWS – air warning system (Radar)
-B-
B. a T. = Bombardamento a Tuffo (Dive Bombers)
BOAC = British Overseas Airways Corporation
BT = Bombardamento terrestre (Land based Bomber)
Btg = Battaglione (Battalion)
b.q.=bassa quota. (low altitude)
(BSD -Base Salvage Depot
-C-
CAI = Corpo Aereo Italiano (Italian Air Corps)
C.A.M. = (Corpo d'Armata di Manovra)
CC.RR = Carabinieri Reali; Royal Carabinieri (Italian Royal Army Core with civilian and military police duties)
C.A.T. = Corpo Aereo Tedesco (German Aerial Corp)
C.R.N. = Centrali Raccolta Notizie (News collection centers) (Lookout posts)
C.I.F.A. = Centro Interpretazioni Fotografie Aeree (Aerial Photography Interpretation Center)
C.I.A.F. = Commissione Italiana Armistizio Francia (Italian France Armistice Commission).
C.I.S.I. = Commissione interministeriale per la sicurezza degli impianti (Interministerial Commission for Installation Safety)
C.G.v.m. = Gran Croce al Valor Militare [Grand Cross for Military Valor]
CM = Caccia marittima [maritime fighter]
CN = caccia notturna [night fighter]
COGEFAG = (Comitato Generale per le Fabbricazioni di Guerra) = General Committee for War Fabrications
(CNASA) = Corpo Nazionale di Avvistamento e Segnalazione Aerea [National Air Sighting and Signaling Corps]
CNA = Compagnia Nazionale Aeronautica di Roma (C.N.A.).
CREM = Contro Aerei Regina Esercito/Marina [Royal army and naval corp] (base air defense)
C.R.I.R.A. = Centro Radio Intercettazioni Regia Aeronautica (Radio Interceptions Center of the Royal Air Force)
CSAS = Comando Servizi Aerei Speciali {Special Air Services Command}
CSAS = Comando Superiore Africa Settentrionale (Northern Africa Higher Command)
C.S.T.A. = Comando Superiore Truppe Albania (Higher Command of Albanian Troops)
CT = Caccia terrestre [Land Based Fighter]
VV.FF. = Corpo Nazionale vigili del fuoco (National Fire Bragade)
C.R.I.R.A. = Centro Radio Intercettazioni R.A. (Radio Interception Center R.A.)
CRN = Centrali Raccolta Notizie (News collection centers)
C. S. = Comando Supremo (Supreme Command)
CSAN = Codice Segnalazioni Aero-Navali (Aero-Naval Reporting Code)
C.S.P.E. = Comando Superiore Possedimenti Egeo (Higher Command of Aegean Possessions)
Cant. = Cantieri Riuniti dell'Adriatico
C.S.A. = Centri Sperimentali Aeronautica (Aeronautical Experimental Centers)
-D-
D.A.T. = Artiglierie schierate per difesa costiera, antinave e contraerea Territorial Defense Command
D.B.K.F. = Deutsche Bestellung Kontrol Frankreich (German order control France)
DCA = Difesa Contro Aerei (Defense against Aircraft).
D.C.A. = Direzioni Costruzioni Aeronautiche (Aeronautical Construction Management)
DECEFARA = Deposito Centrale Forza Assente R.A. [Central Depot Absent Force Regina Areonautica]
DICAT = Difesa Contro Attacchi Aerei Territoriali (Territorial Defence Against air attacks)
DGCA = Direzione Generale dell'Aviazione Civile [Directorate General of Civil Aviation]
D.G.C.A. = Direzione Generale Costruzioni e Approvvigionamenti (General Management of Construction and Procurement)
DSSE = Direzione Superiore Studi ed Esperienze (Higher Command for Studies and Experiences)
-E-
E.A. = east africa (ie Somalia, and/or Etiopia)
e.b. – efficienza bellica [war ready]
E.V.A. = Elleniki Vassili Aeroporia [Greek airforce]
EWS = (Early Warning System)
-F-
F.A.A. = Fleet Air Arm (English naval air service)

F.A.I. = Federation Aeronautique Internationale, {world governing body for air sports}
FASL = (Forward Air Support Link)
FINSIDER = Società degli Alti Forni, Fonderie ed Acciaierie di Terni, = Italy's state steel group,
Fl.Fu.2, = German 2nd Air Corps
FLAK = Flieger Abwehr Kanone (Anti-aircraft cannon)
F.N.S. = Forza Navale Speciale (Special Naval Force)
f.u. = not combat useable/late/deseased
-G-
G.d.F. = Guardia dalla Frontiera (Border Guard)
GARI = Genio Aeronautico Ruolo (a aeronautical engineer)
GARAT = Genio Aeronautico Ruolo Assistenti Tecnici (Aeronautical Engineering Role of Technical Assistants)
G.C. = Comando Generale [General Command]
GCI = Ground Control Interception (ie radar)
GG.UU. = Grand units (Big Units)
GG.FF. = Giovani fascisti (young Fascists)
GG.NN = Grand Navi (Large Ships)
G.I.L. = l'organizzazione giovanile fascista (the fascist youth organization)
GRT = Gross Registered Tons
G.S. = General Staff; originally SM = Stato Maggiore
GSA = General Staff Air Force (see SMA)
GSE = Army General Staff originally Stato Maggiore Esercito
GSG = General Staff General; originally SMG - Stato Maggiore Generali or STAMAGE
GSM = Navy General Staff originally Stato Maggiore Marina
G.U. = Grand Unit (Big Unit)
-H-
-I-
I.G.M. = INDUSTRIA MECCANICA GIRARDELLO (GIRARDELLO MECHANICAL INDUSTRY)
IRI = Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale; = Institute for Industrial Reconstruction
IMI, = Istituto Mobiliare Italiano, = a banking group
IFF identification friend/foe
Italuft = special office of the Luftwaffe of coordination with the Regina Areonautica
-J-
Ja.Bo. = Jagdbomber / cacciabombardieri (fighter-bomber)
-K-
KLM = *Koninklijke Luchtvaart Maatschappij* yal Dutch Airlines
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naamloze_vennootschap
-L-
LATI = Linee Aeree Transcontinentali Italiane (Italian Transcontinental Airlines)
LG = (Lehr Geschwader) [training squadron]
L.L.A. = Lend lease Act
LRDG = long range desert group
LST-LCI-LCT = Landing Craft Infantry, Tank and Landing Ship Tank
-M-
Maricotrat = Albania Traffic Comando Superiore (Albania Traffic Higher Command)
Marinavia = aviation for the Navy
M.A.v.a. = [Silver Medal for aviation]
M.A.v.m. = [Silver Medal for Military Valor]
M.A.C.A. = Milizia Artiglieria Contraerei (M.A.C.A.) (Anti-Aircraft Artillery Militia)
MAC = Mediterranean Air Command
M.B.v.m. = [Bronze Medal for Military Valor]
M.B.v.a. = [Bronze Medal for aviation]
M.E.A.C. = Mediterranean East Air Command
MIS = Military Intelligence Service
M.O.v.m. = [Gold Medal for Military Valor]
M.O.v.a. = [Gold Medal for aviation]
MILMART = Milizia Artiglieria Marittima (Maritime Artillery Militia)
MM = marine militarie (the Italian Navy)
M.N. = Marina Nationale (the French Navy)
MSA = Aircraft repair/parts Depot?
M.U.S.D. = maintenance Unit Storage Depot
MVSN= *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale* (Black Shirts) Volunteer Militia for National Security
-N-
N.C.A. = Nucleo Comunicazioni Avio Linee (Avio Linee Communications Unit)
N.C.A.L. = Nucleo Comunicazioni Ala Littoria (Ala Littoria Communications Unit)
N.C.L. = Nucleo Comunicazioni LATI (LATI Communications Unit)
NF = Night Fighter
N.S.A. = Nucleo Addestramento Siluranti (Torpedo Bomber Training Unit)
NSDAP = National-Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or National Socialist German Workers' Party
-O-
O.A. = Osservazione Aerea (observation aircraft),
O.A. (Anti-sabotage Organizations),
OBS = *Oberbefehlshaber Sud or [Luftwaffe] Command in Chief South (ie Kesselring)*
OKH = Oberkommando des Heeres (Army High Command),
OKL= Oberkommando des *Luftwaffe*
OKW = *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (High Command of the Armed Forces) Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel
OMI = Officine Meccaniche Italiane (Italian Mechanical Workshops)

OMIR = Officine Meccaniche Italiane Reggio Emilia (Italian Mechanical Workshops Reggio Emilia)
O.M.S. = Operazione Missione Spagna, (Operation Mission Spain)
ONC = Opera. Naz. Combattenti. (Opera Nazionale Combattenti was an Italian charitable organization set up to provide assistance to veterans of the WW1)
Ossoaviakim (Aeronautical youth Association Komsomol)
O.T.U. = (Operational Training Unit)

-P-

PAK = Panzer Abwehr Kanone (Anti-tank cannon)
PAV = Posti Avvistamento Velivoli (Aircraft Spotting Posts)
p.b. = muti-barrel
P.a. = Posti di avvistamento (Lookout posts)
P.a. = Aircraft Carrier
PGA = Panzer Group Afica
Pil. = Pilot
PNF = Partito Nazionale Fascista (National Fascist Party)
P.R.N. = Posti Raccolta Notizie (News Gathering Posts)
P.W.B. = Psicologycal Warfare Branch

-Q-

q. = quota [height/hill/point]
Q.G. = quartier generale (HQ)

-R-

R.A. = Regina Areonautica (Royal Italian Air Force)
R.A.F./ME Royal Air Force/ Middle East
Ra Ro. = Radio Detector rangefinder (GDR) and later Radiolocalizzatore/radio-range stations then in for short
Rari Committee (the definition Rari derived from the contraction of Radiolocalizzatori-Radiotelemetri
R.C.T.C. = Regio Corpo Truppe Coloniali (Royal Colonial Troop Corps)
Re.Co. = (Reparto Esplorante Corazzato) [Armored Recon unit]
RDT = Radio Detector Telemetro (Radio Detector Rangefinder)
RIEC = (Regio Istituto per Elettrocomunicazioni) [Royal Institute for Electrocommunications]
RLM = long range maritime recon
RM = Ricognizione Marittima (maritime Recon)
RLM = Reichsluftfahrtministerium (German Reich Aviation Ministry)
R.S.AS. =Reparto Speciale Aerosiluranti (Special Torpedo Bomber unit)
R.S.T. = Ricognizione Strategica Terrestre (Terrestrial Strategic Reconnaissance)
R.T. = Radio/Telegraph
RUNA = Reale Unione Nazionale Aeronautica (Royal National Aeronautical Union) (RUNA), = pre-military aviation training

-S-

SAFAT = Societa Anonima Fabrica Armi Torino,(Turin Weapons Factory Anonymous Company)
S.A.S. = Servizio Aerei Speciali (Special Aircraft Service)
S.C. = Comando Supremo (Supreme Command)
S.C.I.RA. = Servizio Controinformativa R.A. (Air Force Counter-information Service)
S.I.A. = Servizio Informazioni Aeronautical (Air Force Information Service)
SIAI = *Società Idrovolanti Alta Italia* – (Seaplane Company of Upper Italy.)
S.I.E. = Servizio Informazioni ESERCITO (Army Information Service)
S.I.M. = Servizio Informazioni Militari (Military Information Service)
S.I.S. = The Servizio Informazioni Segrete (SIS), (the secret service of the Regia Marina)
SKL = *Seekriegsleitung or* [German] Maritime Warfare Command
S.L. = (Standard Load) ie the weight of the cargo
SM/RE = Stato Maggiore/Regina ESERCITO or General Staff/Royal Army: See GSE
STAVKA = Supreme High Command of the Soviet armed forces [Literally meaning TENT]
Stormo = Wing
Stamage = Stato Maggiore Generale: (General staff general)
Sovietskii Voenno Vozdushnii Flot= Air Fleet of the Red Army
Stabs/OKL = Luftwaffe General Staff
SV = senza visibilità (without visibility)
S.V.S.V. = Scuola di Volo senza visibilità (Flight school without visibility)
SRAM = Scuola Regina Areonautica manutenzione (Royal Air Force maintenance school)
Superalba = Comando Superiore FF.AA. d'Albania (Higher Command of the armed forces of Albania)
S.C.A. = Stabilimento Costruzioni Aeronautiche (Aeronautical Construction Plant),

-T-

tout court = French = quite short : and nothing else : simply : period

-U-

Unfoc = daily shots needs to fire unit
U.N.P.A. = Unione Nazionale Protezione Antiaerea (National Anti-aircraft Protection Union)
U.S.T. = Uffici Sorveglianza Tecnica (Technical Surveillance Offices)

-V-

V.V.S = Voenno Vozdushni Sili - soviet Russian air force command
VSV = volo senza visibilità (flight without visibility)
V.T. = Volo a Tuffo (Dive flight)
VE = Veterinaria Esercito? Army Veterinary Magazine?

-W,X,Y,Z,-

WDAF = *Egypt Western Desert Air Force* (Air Force of the Western Desert)
ZAT = territorial air zone

The Royal Italian Air Force In WW 2 - Volume 2

Rank Equivalents Royal Italian Airforce in WW2

Italy	USA
Officers	
Maresciallo dell'Aria	*Army Commander*
Generale d'Armata Aerea	*General*
Generale designato d'Armata Aerea	
Generale di Corpo d'Armata Aerea	*Lt. General*
Generale di Divisione Aerea	*Major General*
Generale di Brigata Aerea	*Brigadier General*
Colonnello	*Colonel*
Tenente Colonnello	*Lt Colonel*
Maggiore	*Major*
Primo Capitano	*Captain*
Capitano	*Captain*
Tenente	*Lieutenant*
Sottotenente	*2nd Lieutenant*
Aspirante	*Officer Candate*
Enlisted	
Maresciallo di Prima Classe	*Warrant Officer 1st Class*
Maresciallo di Seconda Classe	*Warrant Officer 2nd Class*
Maresciallo di Terza Classe	*Warrant Officer 3rd Class*
Sergente Maggiore	*Sergeant Major*
Sergente	*Sergeant*
Caporal Maggiore	*Corporal*
Caporale	*Lance Corporal*
Soldato	*Private*

Air Unit Equivalents

Italy	US	UK
Squdriglia (9 Aircraft)	Flight	Flight
Gruppo (2 Bomber or 3 Fighter Squadrons)	Squadron	Squadron
Stormo (2 Gruppi)	Group	Wing
Brigade (Varies)	Wing	Group
Division (Varies)	Division	-

CHAPTER ONE

**Events political - strategic- military
economic-productive**

1941 -Events political- military - strategic -The Axis strategy in 1941 - Operation "Colossus" (Tragino River) - The entry into the war of Japan and the United States.[4]

4

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1941 - THE 2nd YEAR OF ITALY AT WAR

The 1939/40 period, including the first 6 months of the war, represented by Italy, and specifically for the Air Force, the dramatic phase of the "vigil", the spasmodic range of "non-aggression", the crucial time of the armed intervention in effect from June 1940.

These initial aspects of the war has been widely described in the first volume of this work and the reader will undoubtedly have had access to, sufficient evaluation topics to reflect and judge of causes and effects, disappointments and defeats, results and conclusions in the swirling succession of various treaties events.

1941, that could be called the year of revenge after so many disappointments, it is in our view the crucial moment of the Second World War, since even so full of extraordinary events: victories in Libya, Greece, Yugoslavia, Crete; submarine warfare, occupation of Syria and Iran by English, the war against the USSR and Japanese intervention against the United States, strengthening the Tripartite Pact opposed by the association of "United Nations", unconsciously hiding among the events that were followed over the course of the year, the germs yet to be identified but latent and loads of exceptional virulence, which will lead to the defeat of the Axis in 1945.

The long and exhausting war between Germany and the Soviet Union, the giant American arsenal that will distribute means to all nations engaged against the Tripartite, the ideals and for bacteria weapons, strategic trend reversal Axis from political offensive tactics defense, the growing onset of destructive attacks from heaven against Germany and Italy, are nothing more than the most obvious aspects of the virus in the incubation which will vest gradually and irreversibly in the following years, in an unstoppable crescendo whose final conclusion will be made in without conditions.

In this gigantic moving world events, the Italian air force has its share of history, its modest but well-defined role of the protagonist, its participation and important, albeit limited to its natural ambience amidst fighting between the Mediterranean and North Africa, enlivened by the presence of its men and its flight units in the Aegean and the Balkans, in Russia and in far and now lost Ethiopia. What follows are the stories of these men in the knowledge of the inferior material, they did not want to desert their place of soldiers in the pages of history.[5]

5

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1941 - The Events Political- Strategic- Military

The year 1941 was for Italy, and specifically for the Italian Air Force a year of great importance for the events that took place, some of them of such extraordinary importance, by changing the balance substantially - that had been created in Europe after German victory in the West, and the end without "winners or losers", the so-called “Battle of Britain”, which had bled both the RAF and the Luftwaffe.

Germany's participation in the war in the Mediterranean with the Afrika Korps and the X Flieger Korps sent by the OKW, were the beginning of the most important events since it helped Italy to deal more adequately the British offensive in Libya which he had resulted in the loss of Cyrenaica, the destruction of the 10th Army and the 5th Air Fleet.

In political terms the accession of Romania and Hungary to the Tripartite Pact had created strategic premise of great South Eastern Europe relief, positions that were recently strengthened following the entry in the alliance of Bulgaria, Finland, Slovakia, which completed the deployment Axis from the Arctic to the Black Sea.

The German attack on Yugoslavia and Greece and the occupation of the Balkans and Crete, had strengthened even more the German defenses and created the warranty and safety conditions in the rear of Southern Europe to the USSR attack. The positive German-Italian counterattack in Libya and the victorious beginning of operation "Barbarossa" had more strengthened political and strategic positions Axis with great results quickly from the Wehrmacht in Russia and the German and Italian units in Cyrenaica until the Egyptian border. The Axis had sought to create sympathy elsewhere, both in the Middle East politically and militarily supporting the insurgency of Iraq, had also helped the Vichy French to resist the English/De Gaulista offensive in Syria by providing troops loyal to Marshal Petain and political support military facilities of all kinds.

Excellent diplomatic relations were established long ago with Spain, and also with Turkey and the political and strategic situation in regard to the Mediterranean and in particular the eastern basin, could be considered very satisfactory.

The year 1941 was largely dedicated by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Pricolo, to eliminating the numerous deficiencies, malfunctions and shortcomings ascertained at the beginning of the war in terms of flight material, engines, installations, instrumentation, equipment, preparation and training, infrastructure, bombs and on-board armaments, flight safety and assistance, aeronautical production, tactical doctrines, establishing new service and collaboration relationships with the Luftwaffe in Italy and Libya.[6]

6

They were sent for demolition or struck hundreds of aircraft not otherwise be used, such as Ba. 88, Ba. 65, Ca. 135, Ca. 133, Ro. 37, S.M. 81, Ca 101, SM. 85 and supplied in return hundreds of new models of airplanes such as SM. 84, MC. 202, Re. 2001, Ca. 313, Cant. 1007 Bis in along with other types of aircraft for school and reconnaissance; It was initiated and increased the production of new engines DB. 601, P. XI Bis, A. 74, RIC. 42, Alfa 128 and began the industrial preparation to produce on license the DB. 605 assigned to Fiat Avio engines.

It was developed considerably in the presence of the 1st line units of torpedo squadrons assigned a little anywhere on the war fronts, improved as far as possible the performance of the fighters, especially towards the end of 1941, with entry into service of Macchi C. 202; began training and preparation of specialists for the use of radio locators and implanted the first radio interception stations to decrypt RAF messages in the Mediterranean; It was also improved professional training of crews and airborne specialists, improved and equipped with new teaching facilities, schools and technical and vocational education institutions, gradually rationalized the aviation industry with the production of such aircraft are strictly necessary to units and with recognized technical quality and use, even if there were more disappointments in this field and with positive achievements.

During 1941 it was extinguished the war activities in the AOI with the loss of the Empire, the air units located therein and the dissolution of the personnel assigned to aviation in East Africa, but opened at the same time for the Italian Air Force, new fronts of war in the Balkans and in Russia, almost automatically compensate for the cessation of the war activities in Belgium with CAI and Greece with the end of the conflict in the Hellenic peninsula. [7]

During 1941 the O.A. He received the new more performing reconnaissance Ca.133 in place of Ca. 311. The twin-engine Caproni was flying at 436 km/h speed, had three machine guns, a range of 1200 km.

7

The effort exerted by the Air Force in this last war campaign had been impressive and in many respects dramatic due to the technical, operational, climatic and psychological conditions in which the war had taken place, with the observed unpreparedness and the ascertained and generalized inefficiency of the Italian Armed Forces, especially of the higher commands, a situation this situation was crudely highlighted by General Pricolo, who, personally charged by Mussolini to ascertain face to face in Albania the causes of the military defeats and the serious state of unpreparedness at many levels of the Army, had dutifully and courageously denounced in a series of objective reports, the gaps, cowardice and incapacity found, rendering, through the truth, precious services to the Country and to the Head of Government but at the same time alienating friends such as that of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ciano, making himself unpopular with many members of the Stamage for his frankness and honesty in exposing the ascertained reality.

The most important result achieved in 1941 under the management of Pricolo, was to put a little in order in the difficult and intricate Italian aeronautics industry issue, calling the order industries accustomed to behaving in a completely autonomous from the real interests of the Air Force, by imposing this mediocre products with outdated and unsolicited and often employable aircraft; It was rationalized as far as possible the production line starting assignment to other aircraft industries for the production in series, not necessarily designed by the buyer; a production practice that became necessary and reasonable and as a result increased application and also strong resistance from business.

In that year was recorded the highest number of aircraft built during the war by the Italian industry with over 3500 aircraft produced for R.A. and opposed it had the lowest number of airplanes exported with only 82 specimens sent abroad (mainly Sweden, Hungary) with a lower overall turnover of 400 million, equal to 1/3 of the recorded turnover in the years 1939/40 and a number of airplanes exported equal to 1/5 of 1937, to 1/3 of 1938, to 1/4 of the years 1939/40: a clear reversal of trends in the economic and financial fields which, however, took into greater account the primary interests of Italian aviation.[8]

Ciampino 28/09/1941 - Deployment of Macchi C.202 of the 9th Autonomous Group C.T. - The most important event for the Italian Air Force in 1941 was the entry into service of the new Macchi C. 202 fighter dubbed "Folgore" - The 9th Group C.T. was sent to Sicily to try the aircraft in battle.

8

They benefited from Italian aeronautical material, essentially spare parts, ammunition and engines - Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Spain, Romania, Hungary!

The Air Force budget in the financial year 1940/41 amounted to 3.287 billion and was lower by only 139 million than that of the Royal Navy and 1,968 million less than what the Army thus bridging, gradually an unjustified financial allocation difference now reduced more correct proportions but in the meantime it had produced not indifferent failures.

During the year, the serious problem of maritime transport with Libya sharpened on several occasions the service relations between Supermarina and Superaereo and between the latter and the Supreme Command. The successes of the British naval aviation against ships and convoys in North Africa, with painful losses of men and ships, were largely attributed to lack of aviation cooperation, missing escorts and poor air surveillance that could not prevent - in according to critics and interested commands - the offensive attacks of submarines and surface vessels are often supported by bombers and torpedo planes based in Malta. Critics alike were spring up in several respects as G.S. of the Air Force for the escort failure claim of the Battle Fleet in the Gaudo/Matapan action and in other meetings with the Mediterranean Fleet during several English attempts to supply Malta and cross the Strait of Sicily.

There were about brightly lit high-level clashes and controversies that embittered the leaders of the R.A. and Gen. Pricolo dutifully defended with vehemence and determination, it function of the Air Force, knowing the commitment and the sacrifices offered generously by crews in hard and exhausting air escorts on the sea pushed quite often even to the sacrifice. [9]

The new Fiat twin engined flying boat / RS.14 entered service in 1941. Designed to replace the outdated Cant.501 instead had additional benefits which complemented the range of the Cant.501 / 506 then in service.

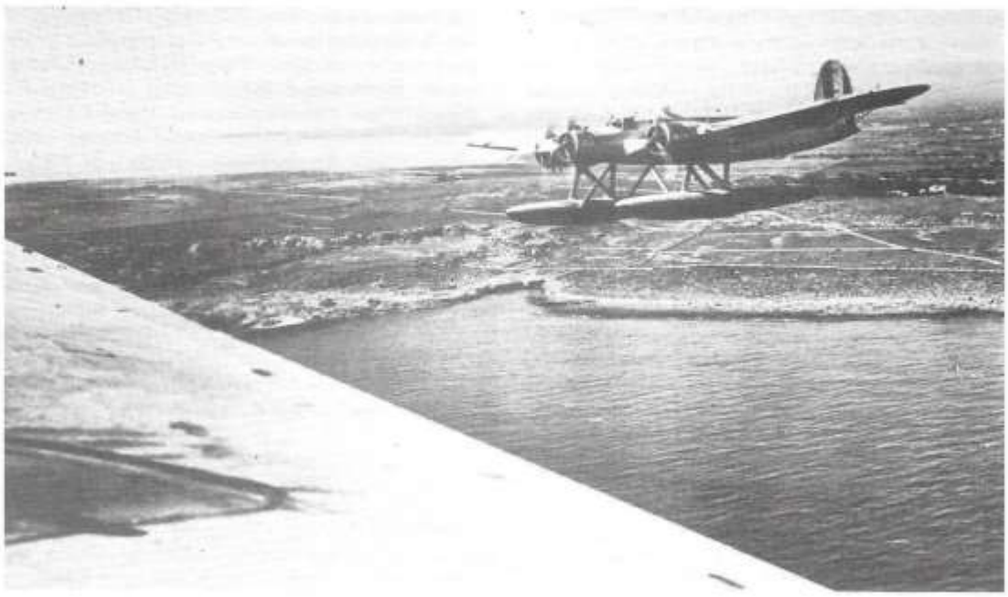
9

Today, in the light of the recent and extraordinary revelations on the interception/decryption activity of the English organization "Ultra" in the Mediterranean, an organization with great operational efficiency, in possession of secret ciphers of the Italian Navy, the Luftwaffe, the Kriegsmarine captured on several occasions on board Italian and German ships or in the commands of the AOI or the Aegean, radio transmissions that allowed to know the preparation of convoys and naval operations in advance and with precision - date, composition, cargo transported, names of ships, ports of departure, times, routes and appointments planned at sea, established naval and air escort, ports of destination. The knowledge of this information and every detail transmitted by radio from the Axis command, made it very easy for the British to place along the route attacks with submarines, cruisers, destroyers, Bombers and torpedo planes and shoot and destroy almost without fail, at the time and place designated merchant ships and escort in spite of all efforts and sacrifices made by the sailors and the Italian and German airmen, who fought and suffered sacrificing in the demeaning atmosphere of distrust and suspicion generated unfairly by the widespread betrayal and active at every level, which is now limited and circumscribed the activity of the Ultra. The nefarious incidents of Matapan, the convoys "Maritza", "Duisburg", "Mantovani" and the Kerkennah islands where were the cruisers "Da Barbiano" and " Da Glussano" sank, are but some of the sad facts of which "Ultra" was the protagonist with the ciphering/deciphering the Enigma machine normally used by the Italian-German command, the machine with which it was possible, knowing the key, capture and decrypt any encrypted radio messages transmitted with codes 10/A, CIT, E7/E8, Impero, ABC, Y1, Zeta, Rome, Riva, S.L., BEN. etc. which came into the possession of the British in different periods of the war between the 1940/41 and cleverly used.

With these very recent revelations, the insinuations of "widespread betrayal at every level" often superficially described have largely fallen away, the unjustified German criticisms of the failure of the Italians to maintain military secrecy have been substantially modified, the declarations of ship commanders who, by unilaterally modifying Supermarina orders and dispositions on pre-established routes and timetables, unknowingly succeeded in cancelling or altering the offensive program of the English and in reaching the ports of destination unscathed have been individually validated, and the criticisms addressed to the Air Force on the thorny problem of naval protection have finally been cancelled out.[10]

The most important change of SAS in 1941 was the entry into service of the new three-engined Fiat / G12/T derived from the civil model. Speed km/h 390 km autonomy. 2300, max Kg weight. 15000.

10



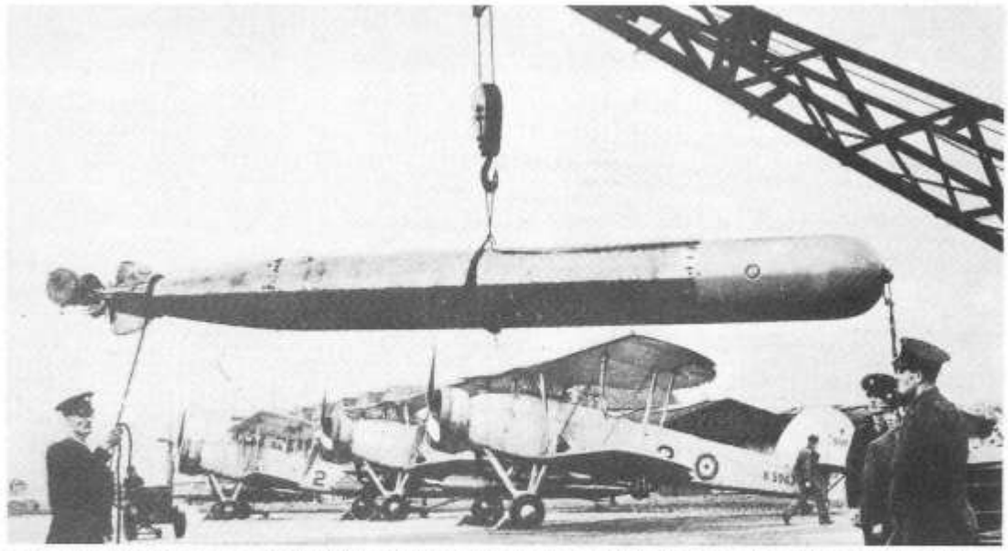
A Cant.506 flying boat in flight to a mission in the Mediterranean - During 1941 numerous Italian rescue aircraft were attacked by R.A.F. during rescue missions.

The Aerial Communication Unit continued their valuable work to link cities and nations and South American operating among difficulties and dangers. A twin engined flying boat Macchi C.94 of the NCAL.

A Cant.501 flies directly over a transport to Libya. The organization of enemy radio-interception called "Ultra Secret," often could knowing the Axis ciphers, with air and naval attacks in thwarting the efforts of the Navy to ensure the supplies to N.A.

Cant a pair of Cant. 501s flies over a MAS in the Sicilian Channel. During 1941 the production of aircraft for the needs of Marinavia included the Ro.43, the Cant. 501/506, the Fiat / RS.14.

The operations center for the defense of Malta which attained news on Italian convoy movements, on the Axis air raids, about the missions planned by Supermarina, Luftwaffe, Superaero entire Mediterranean.



A base of the FAA Mediterranean with Fairey "Swordfish" torpedo bombers ready to take off for offensive missions against the Axis ships engaged hard to ensure essential supplies.

On several occasions, heated differences of opinion arose between Gen. Pricolo and the Chief of Staff Gen. Cavallero, both of whom were irreconcilable characters. These differences culminated in 1941 with an increase in mutual distrust that was bound to lead one day soon to a result of clarifications that was either negative or positive, but certainly inevitable. A situation that certainly did not favor that desirable spirit of cooperation needed to confront and solve serious problems.

In this time period the strategic conduct of the war had to suffer a considerable reduction in importance in the Axis policy, for a variety of reasons arising from the negative results of the war on many fronts and by increased German influence, the whose military intervention in North Africa, Greece and Yugoslavia, had a crucial political importance, and diplomatic in the outcome of the war, from the Balkans to Libya, from Crete to Malta.

Taking the Stamage command from Gen. Cavallero, manifested itself fully after the victory at the end of the war with Greece, and, starting from May 1941, the foundations, the programs were put into place, the directives that were to lead to new perspectives with a raise of Italian strategic vision placed in a different and independent perspective of an assembly, the protagonist and not subject to the setting of the German conflict.

It was certainly a tortuous task but not impossible, possible only with their regained psychological and military supremacy in the Mediterranean seriously affected by the negative effects of the past two fuels, a more massive participation, powerful and decisive in the war and tense obtaining conclusive results.

In this arduous and difficult task set about with renewed enthusiasm Gen. Cavallero, knowing that among the Armed Forces only the Italian Navy still enjoyed, compared to the German military presence in the Mediterranean, a material superiority, sufficient autonomy to manage it, of great ability to manifest it. The Air Force, while making significant organizational efforts, found it hard to reach to the technical level of the Luftwaffe, with its modest flight materials, difficult training missions, weapons and general preparation. The Army paid compared to the Navy and the Air Force, in even more disturbing conditions at each level, and absorbed to the greatest extent the apprehensions and the attentions of Stamage.[11]

11

Blank

The Axis Strategy in 1941

In the spring of 1941 Germany had desisted from continuing the costly air battle against England and had a dedicated politico-strategic settling in the Balkans, which manages to merge gradually into the Tripartite Pact-Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria - events these minor and collateral but equally important for the strategic vision of the Fuhrer, which aims to create the necessary conditions to attack the Soviet Union and eliminate a decisive confrontation, the strongest continental army remained under arms in Europe and then exploit indiscriminately, the great resources human, agricultural, industrial, mining of European Russia up to the Urals - the geographical limit - deemed sufficient to remove from the Reich any potential danger from east.

The next phase of the conflict would be addressed later, a decisive attack against England - on the mother country and the colonies -.

Hitler was opposed to the strategic concept that equally valid and most feasible of the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, which aimed at bringing gradually with wise policy of the British influence in the orbit United States in Europe, by providing to the American President Roosevelt the most enticing aspects and idealistic for a common defense of Democracy, opposing, in the opinion of the British statesman, to a worldwide domination of National Socialism with New European Order which could put in danger the US supremacy if not restricted before and fought thereafter.

It was not difficult astute English politician to offer the USA sufficient grounds to pursue a “Crusade”, together with sound economic effects, in the name of -the slogan "USA Arsenal of Democracy” - that this policy was bearing fruit and that was anticipated by the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, valid reason because we sensitized the United States de facto involvement in the conflict. But there were other reasons in the strategic thinking of the Fuhrer verging at a distance, together with other theoretical events of Admiral Erich Raeder, which advocated naval operations in the Atlantic with battle fleets, blocking the "British imperial route” to Gibraltar to be implemented with the help of Spain, seeing also a "Mediterranean vision" of the conflict very close to the Italian edition in 1940 strategically, with the capture of key positions in the Middle East: Suez, Palestine, Syria, Iran, the Arab countries, as opposed to this continental vision theory of the OKW totally shared by the Fuhrer, the first attack the USSR and later England through the Middle East.[12]

12

A favorable opportunity to partially realize the thought of Raeder's philosophy presented itself in April 1941 in Iraq with the anti-British revolt of Rashid Ali, a rebellion that however broke out in a disorderly manner and in advance, to organize and coordinate large-scale initiatives to the Axis, with the exception of symbolic interventions of Italian and German aircraft that were insufficient to change the situation. In June another opportunity arose with Syria invaded by the English and De Gaullists, but this opportunity also faded away amidst the uncertainties, the preparations for "Barbarossa", and the indecisions of the French authorities.

The two events were the rebuttal of the British strategic initiatives and of the shrewdness of Winston Churchill to prevent potential danger, in an area of extraordinary importance as that of the Middle East, so vital for the continuity of war on England.

Many German initiatives were in part frustrated by inappropriate Italian decisions and was necessary patiently mending every plot rebuilding compromised positions in the Balkans, while the other hand was not able to get any positive results in the French territories of North Africa neglected by the foolishness policy since the time of the armistice of June 1940.

Otherwise proved the British strategic position in the Mediterranean since the cessation of continental war commitments, offered as an alternative to England a direct and favorable comparison with Italy in North Africa, with all the complications arising from such chance against the weak and unprepared by the Axis countries. Because such a comparison could only be necessarily explicate on land, sky and sea, of these elements of centralized interests and the War Office efforts in northern and eastern Africa, on the seas and the skies of the Mediterranean, a concept that is extremely valuable even when revealed to Italy joined Germany after the cessation of the "Battle of Britain" and Hitler resurrected the old Germanic theory of "push toward the east."

The direct confrontation between the British Imperial Army and the Wehrmacht in Greece, was not positive as "Crusader" by Wavell in Libya, as British units would carry the battle with German Panzer *divisionen* that the time needed to re-embark quickly and messily in the southern ports of Greece, leaving the entirety of equipment and heavy armament of the BEF; a 1941 repeat of the disastrous defeat of Dunkirk repeated exactly one year after the first confrontation.

Also serious losses suffered at sea by the Mediterranean Fleet by the Luftwaffe to show that the Mediterranean was the keystone of the Axis strategy and not only Italian, this aspect disregarded by the Fuhrer whose thoughts were now definitely to the east. A decision which again saved England from certain defeat the Axis could inflict in different and changing conditions on the North African battle ground first, and then on that of the Middle East later.

This constant danger prompted Winston Churchill to further strengthen his contacts with the United States, enough to persuade Roosevelt to adopt a more aggressive and provocative policy toward the Axis, he could not obviously get from the USSR, Churchill's own admission, that desirable military agreement that conflicting ideologies prevented England to realize even politically.

In this waiting time of events that sooner or later you would have succeeded in the general panorama of the conflict, the British military policy was paid to the implementation of a modest aggressive demeanor but irritating implemented with the RAF raids on Germany and Italy, with *colpi di mano* of Commandos and Paratroopers in Norway, France, Italy. But outside of such modest harassing and offensive initiatives, the major concern of the Imperial General Staff State was constantly drawn to the strengthening of the Middle East and of Malta, to the defense of Arab and Persian oilfields, to elimination of the ferments of revolt Iraq, Syria and the West Bank-Palestine that potentially threatened the British rear in the Mediterranean in the same way that threatened the Balkans the German rear in the spring of 1941.

The strengthening of the War Cabinet plan for the Middle East for 1941 program included a local force of 19 divisions including 5 Armored and Motorized, an air force of not less than 45 line squadrons between fighters, fighter/bombers, tactical bombers with 750 modern airplanes and as many reserves, the qualitative development of the Mediterranean Fleet.

The first offensive operation against Italian national territory was completed in February 1941 by the paratroopers arrived from England.[13]

13

Operation «Colossus» (Tragino River)

At the same time the arrival in Italy of X Fl. Kps. the activities the British carried out a sabotage operation intended to damage or neutralize the great and important Apulian Aqueduct complex -the longest in the world - in order to create unrest among the southern populations and block with the power interruption the industries in the area. It was as you can well understand, more than one mission at a psychological and military purpose, since the effects were very minor and randomness as uncertain as then ultimately operation results showed.

The operation «Colossus» conventionally so called, was given for the practical execution to the paratroopers of the 2nd Battalion stationed at Ringway near Manchester, which were reinforced by a group of specialist engineers in destruction; a total of about 80 men were selected for the purpose.

On February 7, 1941 took off from England on board a twin-engine "Whitley" of the 1st Training School Sqdn. direct to Gibraltar as a technical step, and then go to Malta at about 3200 km from England, accompanied by a "Sunderland" carrying materials and equipment needed.

The paratroopers were under the command of Maj. T.A.C. Pritchard and had to act when the survey would take photos of the area to attack. On February 9, a twin-engine Martin A. 30 of the 69th Sqdn. reconnaissance aircraft based in Malta, piloted by the commander of the unit Warbuton, photographing the entire mountainous area of the Vulture, the hydraulic works of Tragino river and identified the chosen location for launching a short drive from the mountain resort of Calitri in Lucania.

Decided the mission, on 10 February in the evening took off from Luqa 7 “Whitley” with paratroopers and 4 bombers of the 148th Sqdn. in charge of secondary missions bombing Apulia, and near Avellino, to divert defenses of the area and avoiding the DICAT alert of the identification of twin-engine with paratroopers directed to the central mountains of Lucania.

They were bombarded between 21:30 and 24:30 civilian targets that were causing little damage and the death of four persons with wounding.

A plane was shot down by the flak of Battipaglia and the crew captured after it was launched with a parachute. At the same time the launch occurred on the direct line of Calitri to the 21:45 by 36 men with 7 officers and with the reinforcement of a group of engineers later arrived for a delay in taking off from Luqa, accompanied by an Italian interpreter called fictitiously Serge Dupont but actually answering to the name of Giuseppe Picchi.[14]

14

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At 00:30 of the 11th the stretch undermined by the sappers exploded destroying the arch of reinforced concrete canal bridge 102 m long with 4 arches 2 swings and was interrupted water flow of Tragino towards the main Puglia aqueduct pipeline.

The paratroopers were put in direct march towards the Gulf of Sapri where they were to wait for the submarine "Triumph" but in the morning were also identified with the assistance of Ro. 37 scouts of the 131st Sqd. O.A. took off from Capodichino and after a brief firefight in which a security guard and a local civilian were killed, all were captured.

While the identified military enemies were locked up in the POWs camp of Sulmona, Picchi tried by a military tribunal was recognized guilty of treason and sentenced to be shot in the back was later executed.

The sabotage operation had involved only one among the many mouths of the Apulian aqueduct inlet, which was promptly repaired and in the short period of six days to be restored to the technicians and workers record time. The transaction was therefore not achieved the goals that the enemy was intended as more aroused concerns instead the English initiative between military and civilian authorities, leading to a territorial defense organization strengthening and improvement of that anti-parachutist had shown the service command dysfunction,

Much appreciated in those days was the work of reconnaissance of the 66th Group O.A. who performed on behalf of numerous Stamage missions and photographed several times the area attacked by enemy paratroopers.

It was not neglected in the English strategic program the possibility of fomenting riots and sabotage in the countries occupied by the Axis, into account that some time between London arrangements had been made and the movements of European resistance to the military and political assistance.

For this purpose, it had been formed in England a special organization called S.O.E. (Special Operations Executive) designed to coordinate, harmonize and finalize the various anti-German movements.

The British strategic plan underwent a sudden variation in June when Germany attacked the Soviet Union and new, important political and military prospects, offered themselves incredulous eyes of the British strategists and especially to Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who began the correspondence with Stalin culminated in agreements, supplies of war materials, assistance, military, joint plans of border areas.

It took until 8 December 1941 for the British strategic vision to expand its boundaries even further than in the past, assuming positive prospects and dimensions that would produce ahead of time the decisive turning point in the conflict that had been anxiously awaited for so long.

Much more modest and limited compared to 1940, resulted the Italian strategic vision drastically reduced as implemented by the defeats in Greece and Libya and the severe losses suffered by the Navy between the night of Taranto and the ambush of Matapan.

More than a real strategic vision and proper, you could speak more realistically contingent need to defend themselves from the enemy initiative, now that resulted in nuanced also void the strategic perspective of the Suez Canal and the hypothetical but unattainable reunification with isolated Africa East now completely on the defensive and besieged on all sides.

Coldly assessing the military situation in which it was Italy after the successful conclusion of the war with Greece and Yugoslavia, the structural and operational transformation of Stamage, the advent of new managers to the maximum of command of the Armed Forces Summit, was still valid in part, the strategic assumptions of the year 1940 plan, the most logical solution was still represented by the face of North Africa, from the attack decisively, and successfully to the Suez Canal and the penetration in the Middle East in the direction of Turkey and Persia. The achievement of these objectives would be granted access to the Suez Canal, the forced removal will destroy the Mediterranean Fleet, the capture of the oil fields of Arabia, Iraq and Persia of vital importance for England and of course for the Axis, the attack on Russia even from its southern borders to force her to retreat pressed from two sides, beyond the Urals and the Caucasus: a strategic vision certainly ambitious but not impossible if it was concretely substantiated by the participation of Germany, considered objectively impossible by Italian to achieve with means and resources at its disposal.[15]

15

There is in this regard a memorandum of Gen. Roatta – Deputy Chief the Army GS - of December 1940, which promises joint action with the Germanic Armed Forces in the Mediterranean against England, with the intention to "break the Mediterranean hinge of the British Empire"; It was wished for the Italian Army the constitution of powerful armored units and very large availability of anti-tank weapons, to counter effectively the large British armored units and through this joint action, to attempt the capture of Alexandria and the Nile Delta.

Wisely concluded the Roatta memo:

a) it is not considered probable that enemy number one can be defeated by striking him in the Motherland. It is considered possible to defeat him by breaking the Mediterranean hinge of his Empire;

b) given that the opponent concentrates at it most of its forces Italy is in no position to fulfill - by itself - this task;

c) as a result it is necessary to accomplish in common, replacing the current parallel actions yet distinct and distant, a powerful collective action aimed at the aforesaid purpose;

d) that action should be implemented in the Balkans, North Africa, the sea and in the air, then move from the Balkans to the Levant;

e) preliminary to that action should be:

- Intimate understanding, clear and consistent from the standpoint of political and military;

-direction virtually unique, in the sense of preparing and conducting operations in perfect accord of individual forces, fall within the framework of collective action;

-put in common materials, not being admissible that one fight with inadequate means while the others provide weapons to third parties, not all reliable.

f) It is not in all this aid, but merely the concentration of efforts in the theater of operations naturally more vulnerable to the Axis, and in which the opponent can be effectively hit and where - realizing what - focuses its Strength.

The acute and objective view of Gen. Roatta, the only possible in a strategic situation already deteriorated considerably, restated individually in Italian key thoughts already expressed by Admiral Raeder, despite not knowing all the ideological and strategic views and only the will of a confident and strong-willed boss could be envisaged, albeit as an alternative to the Fuhrer thought to obtain membership, commitment and collaboration, even partial, of the Reich. It was necessary above all to grasp as described in paragraph e) and obtain weapons and modern equipment from Germany, also in the form of sale of construction licenses, no longer delude ourselves or mucking around in hypothetical ambitious production plans and distant and modest national projects that would come too late and in too small numbers to change the military situation and create better conditions of struggle.

* * *

The vital problem of supplies to Libya using Tunisian ports was partially solved with the French authorization made only to the Germans, to grant transit to non-warlike materials.

Another strange aspect of assessment of the facts and circumstances which the armistice did with France - restrictive and unnecessary for the purpose of the continuation of the conflict - evidenced unfavorably to Italy.

On June 2, 1941 took place a meeting at the Brenner Pass between Hitler and Mussolini accompanied by the respective military delegations were discussed and also related to the war supply problems in North Africa, the sending of other German special units, to the solution of the problem which Tobruk as prerequisite for the continuation of the offensive towards Egypt.[16]

16

Had been activated on the provisions of General Cavallero (Prot. N. 9740 of 05.25.41/OP) agreed between Gen Pricolo and Adm. Riccardi, a small interforce operational nucleus inserted into Stamage represented by Gen. D.A. Peter Mattei and by Adm. Giuseppe Fioravanzo with the cooperationand coordination of General Antonio Gandin of the Supreme Command, who was to study the possibility of joint action against the British fleet, drawing it into a well-specified point of the Mediterranean to strike heavily with the Air Force and Naval Battle Fleet.

On 06/14/41with the provision of the Duce (Prot. N. 40035/Op.) Direct to the Air Force and Navy Chiefs of the GS, the proposal stated:

"With the upcoming return to R.N. Fleet of the "Vittorio Veneto", with the possibility to have air units already destined to fight in Greece, and bearing in mind the program of torpedo bombers in progress, you can concretely prepare the naval air mass action against the British fleet in the Mediterranean, that the GS of the [Italian] Royal Navy and the [Italian] Royal Air Force have just studied together the provisions of this Supreme Command.

To implement effective and timely intervention against the naval forces is necessary to enable an array of acting with the bulk of the naval and air forces against parts of the English fleet, in areas where the air protection is ensured according to the study mentioned above.

Do I have:

1) The action will be set up in the area: to the west, between the 70th meridian and Sicily; to the east, up to the practical of fighter range limits (110 miles from Cape Passero).

2) The location of the naval unit must be such as to allow the timely meeting of the forces at sea.

3) The deployment of air units, using the most of the island bases will allow to gravitate with the largest number of units and torpedo bombers, both to the east and west of the Strait of Sicily and will have to ensure effective fighter air cover of our ships."

There followed a series of detailed provisions on the continuation of the normal military activities, on the intervention of the greatest possible number of torpedo bombers, the preparation of the bases with the necessary equipment and armament, the implementation of the links between air and naval bases, exercises and studies in common.

The Chief of Staff/Air Force was given the specific task of designating a general officer responsible for coordinating the organization of the air mass, the training of the units and exercises.

It was a first advised and called for measures to establish a new type of collaboration, which could and should undoubtedly give positive results if carried out with commitment, reliability and lack of mental reservations. The beginning of the conflict with the USSR and the precise intentions of the Fuhrer to conduct alone the war against Russia, despite Mussolini's invitation to take part in the conflict also for ideological reasons, convinced the Italian Supreme Command that from now every Italian effort had to be concentrated and directed on the face of North Africa - unique and real war field on which it was possible to face and beat England; intention, which was to find this total commitment, high responsiveness and consistency in strategic leadership and Italian war production for much of 1942 to produce the desired results, but was rejected, however, by other events.

In early summer 1941, the Italian Army had available 63 Division of the 73 mobilized in the same period of 1940, a few 10 had been lost in North Africa.

The type of units prepared had not changed, despite the convincing indications provided by the campaigns in Libya; there had been no increase in armoured or motorised units, nor had there been any qualitative improvements in the material or substantial progress in the training of the units or changes in the tactical procedures for the employment of infantry and armoured units.

Alongside the R.A. had worked in harmony of purpose and with the same dedication and devotion to military duty, the Voluntary Militia for National Security [MVSN] with its battalions inserted organically into Army divisions, the territorial and coastal defense. The MILMART (Militia Artillery Maritime) instead inserted in the Royal Navy, was operating with its coastal and anti-aircraft batteries to defend areas of great maritime importance as naval bases, waypoints, stretches of coastline suitable for landings, even placing of points of plane spotting integrated into DICAT network. It was being set up a tactical support mobile unit designed to operate in North Africa and fully motorized to move urgently to the intervention points.

Finally, the MACA (Militia Artillery Against Aircraft) operated throughout the national territory with lookout points, news collection centers, batteries of aerophones, cannons, and searchlights.[17]

17

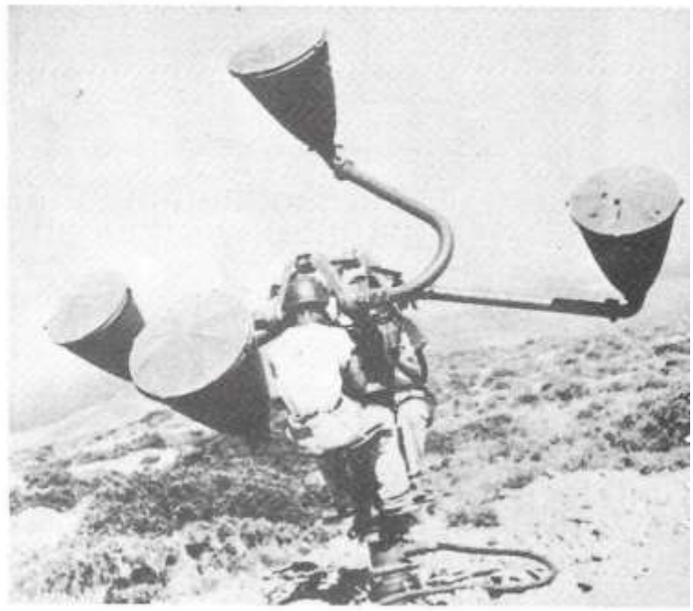
The M.V.S.N. had mobilized in 1940 a total of 8,625 officers and 220,712 NCOs and graded soldiers and sorted as follows: a MSVN General Command, a CC.NN. Battalion Command Group., 3 CC.NN. Assault Battalion Command Groups., 58 CC.NN. Battalions inserted in the Grande Units of the RA, 78 mobile territorial Cohorts, 23 Centuries of coastal defense, 22 MACA Legions with 221 batteries approx, 14 Milmart Legions with 149 AS/AA batteries, a motorized Militia Forest Grouping, 7, motorized Militia Centuries of the Road, mobilized units special Port Militia, postal and telecommunications, Railway, Woodland.

Overseas units mobilized: in A.S.I. (N.A.) -2 Corps Commands, three divisional commands, 6 Legion Commands, 23 CC.NN. Battalion, 2 coastal Battalions. *Italian Possession of Aegean* - 2 CC.NN. Battalions, *Albania* - 2 Legions of 4 Battalions and 2 machine Gunners Cos., A.O.I. (E.A)-30 CC.NN. Battalions.

A considerable force that brought a great contribution to the joint effort of all the Armed Forces on all war fronts suffering heavy losses in men and equipment in Libya, East Africa and later in Russia and the Balkans.

Gen. B.A. Virgilio Scagliotti responsible for the SIA. During 1941 the Aeronautical Information Service was further enhanced, more adequately equipped increasing efficiency and operational capabilities.

Air phones location of "Galileo" the Navy installed on the southern coast of Sicily. The defensive organization of the Navy had great importance for territorial protection.



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The Italian strategic concepts for 1941 were ultimately simplified and more theoretically realisable than the more vague, demagogic, confused and unrealisable ones - enunciated by Stamage in 1940 at the beginning of the war, but these concepts, even in the linearity of their approach, presented aspects and objective difficulties in being fully translated into reality, due to a series of known or little known elements that are equally worth bringing to the attention of readers so that they can draw from them reasons for reflection and analysis:

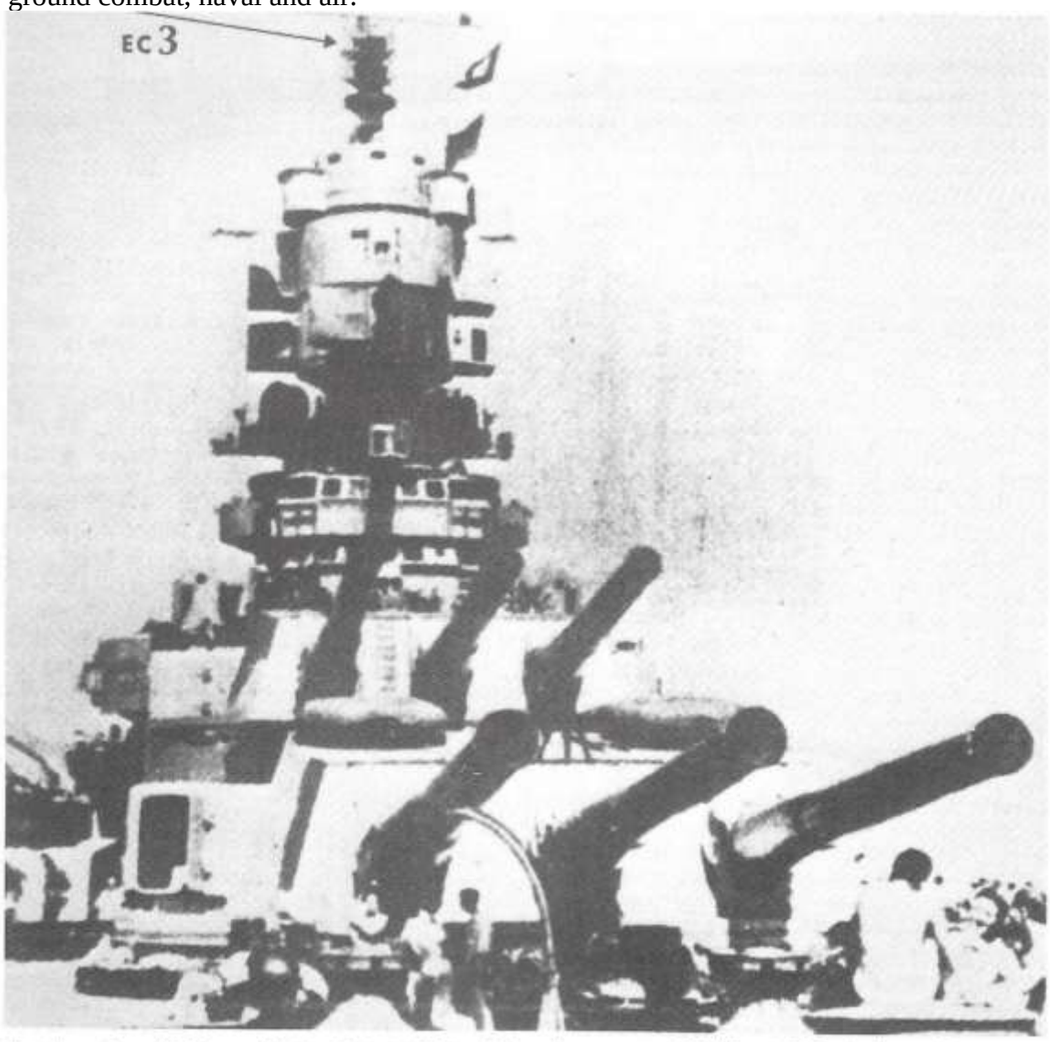
1) Persistent unavailability in the Italian military arsenal of modern and competitive armaments and equipment (aircraft carriers, anti-aircraft units, fast and well-equipped submarines, improved and modernly equipped bomber aircraft, twin-engine heavy fighters, fast and well-armed fighters, field guns, tanks, armoured cars, special vehicles, anti-tank weapons, fighter spotting and guidance radars, echo sounders {SONAR}).

2) Non-renewal and adaptation of the tactical use doctrine, necessary for harmoniously accompany the technological upgrading efforts. This problem particularly felt in the Army and Air Force.[18]

18

3) Inadequate and insufficient training methods due to a lack of renewal of teaching criteria that were influenced by old, outdated concepts that were no longer up to the task, as manifested in a modern war that severely engaged infantry units, motorized, mechanized and armored units, anti-aircraft and anti-tank units; night combat and poor visibility for the Navy, gaps for bombers and combat between fighters for the air force.

4) Pictures do not always rise to the occasion for thinking and professional preparation, with no adequate flexibility to quickly fulfill various aspects and typical modern evolutionary multi use of ground combat, naval and air.[19]



The Italian radar mod. EC.3 created by Ugo Tiberio in 1939 installed on telemetry tower of B.B. "Littorio". After the disaster Matapan even the Italian ships were gradually equipped with radar.

19

Born in 1941 the first C.R.I.R.A. centers (Radio Centro Interceptions Regia Aeronautica) and R.D. (Radio disturbance) set up in Sicily to counter the enemy's activities - The specialists S.M. Barburo and Cassonello first radio interceptors of the R.A.

.

These simple statements *are* of extraordinary historical importance because they contain the essential technical and doctrinal elements of success, obviously excluding the moral and volitional aspects inherent in the human element that the Italian soldier possessed to a high degree even if in a discontinuous form, strangely linked to certain irrational aspects of behavior that were more superficial than substantial. Therefore, there were all the necessary components theorized by experts in military art but the concrete aspects were missing to translate into reality: hopes, offensive programs, practical realizations, convincing results.

How could the strategic program be implemented if the weapons were lacking in the desired quantity and quality, if the doctrines of employment and training were lacking, if enthusiasm and faith in the proven evidence of the enemy's qualitative and tactical superiority were lacking?

All these problems put conscientiously study and responsibly set to achieve them, they will not find commendable solution until the end of the conflict disregarding the user action, thwarting directives, making sterile every admirable effort of soldiers and commanders. One problem that this will drag on unresolved until the armistice, and even to a lesser extent, constitute in our view of the fundamental causes of the Italian military defeat.

Yet despite this irreversible situation of inferiority, the Italian soldier remained firm and fought on all fronts of war, in the heavens, in the sea.

There was, therefore, by all the Italian soldiers of all the armed forces, a strong desire to contribute to the re-establishment of the situation, not to suffer passively more enemy bold acts initiatives such as the Apulian aqueduct sabotage carried out on Italian soil, the attack in Genoa, the ambush of Matapan. All aspects of a precise provocative policy that was necessary to block and counter with the same will and decision. Among the important things that happened in 1941, must be included the supply by Germany of the first apparatus for radio-determination (Funkmess or radar) delivered to the Italian Navy (model. Seetakt / De.Te.) And the Royal Air Force (model Leone) the establishment of the first schools for RDL specialists for the Armed Forces required to bridge the severe technological handicap of Italy; There were also additional requests for anti-submarine research equipment, special equipment, modern fighters for night interception and long-range escort for convoys (twin-engine Bf.110) although the way the Stamage relied, perhaps excessively, on Re.2000 GA (Great Autonomy) fighters that will be used only in small numbers in 1943 embarked on the Naval Forces.

The Chief of General Staff relaunched with renewed enthusiasm and confidence the moral and psychological bases of the Italian strategic vision, placed in a different and more autonomous overall vision, protagonist and not subordinate to the German approach to the conflict in some respects overbearing and oppressive. [20]

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The first Italian ship to receive the radar supplied by Germany was the DD "Legionnaire" which was equipped with a mod. Fu. MO. DE.TE. of the GEMA Soc. (Fu. MO. 24/40 -G. "Seetakt") other Funkmess were used for training.

In 1941 R.A. Was received a first group of Funkmess model Fu.MG.L.40 of Lorenz Soc. (called "Leo" for in the initial address) which was equipped with the first Italian interforce school for radar operators.

* * *

The Italian military arsenal had not produced any particular innovations in the armament and equipment sector in 1941, and the most visible aspects of the felt technological renewal had manifested themselves in the armoured units with a slightly improved but still unsatisfactory model of the medium tank M.14/41 and with the assignment of the first excellent SPA/AB.41 armoured cars. It was in an advanced stage of testing and pre-production series a self-propelled tank built on the hull M.13/40 equipped with a 75/18 howitzer from Ansaldo (Semovente M.41), and it was in the study a heavy tank (P.40) provided with 75/34 cannon and with a total weight of 26 tons. Similarly to the testing phase was a light Semovente (L.40 with 47/32 gun) of mod. L.6 hull. Among the artillery they had been awarded the first modern 75/32 cannons derived from the 75/18 mod. 34 howitzer while they were in the normal allocation 75/46 mod. 34. A/A cannons. They began to enter service the excellent Ansaldo 90/53 mod. 41 A/A cannons better in certain respects to the famous Krupp Flak 88/56 cannon. Among the heavy artillery was in production the 149/19 mod. 41 Howitzer.

With these weapons certainly not very effective in performance and number of available copies, it could not determine a valid qualitative comparison with the English material, which was to be added that much more efficient US that was coming to England profusely with "Lend Lease Act" nor start a comparison with what was now validly tested on so many battle fields by the German ally.

It was therefore necessary to find for the Army an urgent emergency solution but, pending the setting made most suitable national planning materials, implementing and applying injury both courageously done by the Air Force, the adoption of foreign technologies with the acquisition Mercedes Benz DB.601 engine who had, however, made it possible to achieve the competitive Macchi C.202.[21]

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In this regard, it is appropriate to mention an illuminating episode that was covered up due to a lack of foresight and a clear blindness to rationally resolve the serious problems imposed by the conflict, and limited technological visions that were certainly not up to the times and the importance of the Italian Army.

In June 1941 Professor Valletta Fiat called the Stamage for explanations of the M.13/41 defects referring to Gen. Cavallero that the German authorities were willing to give permission to build under license the mod. Sd.Kfz.141 (Panzer Kampfwagen III) tanks and, if necessary, in a short succession of time, also the mod. Sd.Kfz.161 (Pz.IV).

These were two excellent German tanks that made up the backbone of the Armored Div. since 1940 and who remained in the service changed and increasingly improved until the end of the conflict. They had a weight of Tons. 22/25, speed of 40 km/h, range between 160/300 km, armament consists of cannons 50/42 (later replaced with 75/24) for Pz.III gun and 75/24 for the Pz. IV; excellent protection between 60/80 mm, 5 men crew, good equipment.

The Pz.III was faster than any American or British tank in service in 1942, better armed of then its opponents with his rapid-fire cannon, for destructive effects, output and initial speed, equipped with more powerful engine. It was exceeded only by the performance and operating characteristics by the Soviet T.34/76: a champion among all tanks of 1941/43.

To build for the Wehrmacht Pz.III in Fiat workshops, Germany offered raw materials equal to 160% with Fiat's commitment to deliver 100 copies monthly within 6-7 months from the signing of the agreement.

Followed until March 1942 when the project Pz.III was abandoned by indifference, a series of inconclusive conversations, service interviews, reports or technical reports, production, financial clearly dilatory in perspective to have as soon as the Italian P.40 tank which eventually tire the German representatives and Fiat. The P.40 tank, will enter service in a few specimens in the late summer of 1943. The advent of Gen. Cavallero with full of Chief of the GSG functions coincided with a transformation of the Supreme Command expanded and improved in its structure, with the setting the problems inherent in the strengthening and upgrading of the Army, the supplies to Libya, industrial upgrading, relations with Germany, coordination of air and naval operations, a greater harmony among all the Armed Forces

The reorganization of Stamage (now called the Supreme Command) did not at least initially, the complete approval of all employees, particularly of the Air Force command, that by the mouth of its Chief of Staff. Gen. Francesco Pricolo, advanced some reservations about certain prerogatives that the RDL. n. 661 of 27/06/41, granted to the Chief of the GSG in relation to provisions relating to the office and its powers, but probably influenced in such perplexity of Gen. Pricolo even special personal reasons, with a pinch of purely subjective position but otherwise it will have its weight at the end of the year when Gen. Cavallero propose to Mussolini the replacement of the Chief of Staff/RA.

But outside of the thought of the individual responsible for the Armed Forces and the reservations expressed by them in their personal capacity, the need to amend the General Staff was undoubtedly felt and hoped for a better and more effective coordination between all the armed forces, to better empower and accurate shape for the Chief of GSG and direct its work more effectively and incisively than in the obscure past of Badoglio absolutely disastrous. In this respect there was undoubtedly a clear improvement in the action of command at the top of the Armed Forces and in the joint conduct of the war and to this positive result it would certainly not estrange the remarkable professional skills and sharp intelligence of Gen. Cavallero.

The offices and departments of the Supreme Command, expanded and modified by the reform in the service mission, were assigned the following officers:

Special Secretariat: Col. Senzadenari.

Foreign liaison: Barone Scammacca (Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Secretariat GSG: Lt. Col. Fornara.

War Economy: Lt. Col. Ferretti and Maj. Borgoni.

Foreign (military affairs): Col. Mattioli.

Communications: C. F. Elena (R.N.).

S.I.M.: Lt. Col. Bertacchi, C. F. Radius (R.N.). G.S. Mixed (air and naval operations) Gen. Gandin, Adm. Fioravanzo Gen. Mattei (R.A.).

1st Department, Operations Gen. Gandin Gen. Fassi, C.V. Girosi (R.N.), Col. Gallo (R.A.), Lt. Col. Manzoli, Lt. Col. Vigliero, Lt. Col. Montezemolo, Lt. Col. Bitocco.

2nd Department, Orgazation: C.V. Daretti (R.N.), Col. Ciccodicola, Lt. Col. Meloni, Lt. Col. Calzavara.[22]

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3rd Department, Training: Col. Cremese, Lt. Col. Longo, Lt. Col. Spinola, Col. Rondoni, Col. Rossi, Cap. Capperucci.

The expansion of the functions of the Stamage/Supreme Command and consequently the governing organs, radically transformed the highest military authority for the direction of the Italian war from a simple advisory body, which was in effect failing, in a complex organism, directly responsible to the Duce - Supreme Commandant of all the Armed Forces Italian for the King's -in delegation a qualified apparatus for the preparation of plans, the preparation, planning and direction of military operations, with the necessary connections to the areas of war production, for information at all levels, for relations with the foreign and more considered necessary to conduct of the war.

In this new context, the figure of the Chief of the GSG clad especially important as a "filter" and coordinator between the G.S. of the different Armed Forces and higher overseas commands against the Supreme Command at the summit, the figure that in many ways it could be comparable to the position held within the OKW by Field Marshal Keitel and that in this respect put Gen. Cavallero on a level of equality at work and hierarchical importance with the German allies, and under some particular aspects, in a position of more marked autonomy of action and command with respect to the German general.

The most important aspect of the renewed switching action carried on through the Supreme Command, was aimed at strengthening the N.A. front in which Italy and Germany were operating jointly against England.

The situation of the Italian Armed Forces Libya was so precarious, however, be considered as accepted and granted a further and probably German offer to reinforce the Afrika Korps, offer that could not be disregarded by the Italian of course while considering the complications that a further strengthening of the German presence would have meant in future service reports.

Under the command of the summit was renewal renovated and rearranged S.I.M. which had not provided until then the results that were expected from such an important service. It was placed under the personal supervision of the Chief of the GSG.

To the War Office was appointed Gen. Scuero, Gen. Magli was assigned to the GSG as General Officer in charge to the Chief of the GSG. The detailed description of the real situation in which found in 1941 the Italian Armed Forces, could not go beyond it to be ignored in the context in which it operated the Air Force as an integral part of the military apparatus of the nation. Knowledge of the technical situation and operational instructor for the G.U. of the R.A. can not take an interlocutory vision and superfluous aspect of that description, but is particularly important for the aviation tactical employment explication, whose participation in the analysis of individual feats of arms, finds its reason for being in results arising from transactions.

It has been said many times, in the course of the description of the war on the various war fronts, the criticisms that remain goes to the work of the Air Force, often defined as critical determinants for the failure to complete the offensive or defensive success was; Today a better and objective knowledge of training situation, armament and equipment supplied, employee logistics and means, can provide a more clear and serene view of the readers difficulties experienced to achieve tactical results with so modest assumptions, emphasizing in opposed the action, intervention and sacrifices of the airmen lavish in an attempt often impossible, to support the action of the foot soldiers, the tank crews, gunners. June 2, took place at the Brenner first meeting between Gen. Keitel and Cavallero for the solution of common problems, including the use of Tunisian ports to ensure supplies to Libya, the assignment to Italy of raw materials, fuel, coal. In North Africa were established air reinforcement measures (new fighter units), A/A batteries (36 batteries of heavy and light), 7 coastal batteries.

Gen. Keitel threw into relief the difficulties of Rommel to have available a larger number of artillery to bombard Tobruk, an increase in aviation units, assigning heavier and more destructive bombs to be correct for the obstinate enemy resistance.

Already beginning to appear the first differences of opinion between Rommel and the Italian N.A. commanders and particularly with Gens Gariboldi, Gambara and Almone Cat and finished breaking down the initial harmony that had produced the reconquest of Cyrenaica in such a short time and the heavy defeat of the English units.[23]

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3a Reparto, Addestramento: Col. Cremese, Ten. Col. Longo, Ten. Col. Spinola, Col. Rondoni, Col. Rossi, Cap. Capperucci.

L' ampliamento delle funzioni dello Stamage/Comando Supremo e conseguentemente degli organici direttivi, trasformò radicalmente il massimo ente militare per la direzione della guerra italiana da un semplice organo di consulenza, quale era in effetti predominante, in un organismo complesso, direttamente responsabile verso il Duce - Comandante supremo di tutte le FF.AA. italiane per delega del Re -in un qualificato apparato per l' approntamento di piani, la preparazione, pianificazione e direzione delle operazioni militari, con collegamenti necessari ai settori della produzione bellica, per le informazioni ad ogni livello, per i rapporti con l'estero ed altris ancora ritenuti necessario alla conduttra della guerra.
In tale nuova contesto, la figura del Capo di SMG rivestiva particolare importanza quale « filtro» e coordinatore fra gli S.M. delle diverse FF.AA. e i superiori comandi d'oltremare nei confronti del vertice del Comando Supremo, figura che per molti aspetti poteva paragonarsi alla posizione che ricopriva in seno all' OKW il Feldmaresciallo Keitel e che sotto tale aspetto metteva il Gen. Cavallero ad un livello di parità professionale e importanza gerarchica con gli alleati tedeschi, e sotto alcuni aspetti particolari, in una posizione di più spiccata autonomia di azione e di comando rispetto al generale tedesco.
L' aspetto più importante della rinnovata azione di comando applicata attraverso il Comando Supremo, fu rivolto al potenziamento del Fronte dell' A.S su cui Italia e Germania operavano in comune contro l' Inghilterra.
La situazione delle FF.AA. italiane in Libia era però così precaria, da ritenere come accettata e accordata una ulteriore e probabile offerta tedesca di rafforzare l' Afrika Korps, offerta che non poteva essere ovviamente disattesa da parte italiana pur considerando le complicazioni che un ulteriore rafforzamento della presenza tedesca avrebbe comportato nei futuri rapporti di servizio.
Nel quadro del rinnovamento del vertice di comando venne ristrutturato e riordinato il S.I.M. che non aveva fornito ena o qual momento qua risultati che ci si aspettava da così importante servizio. Venne posto sotto la personale vigilanza del Capo di SMG.
Al Ministero della Guerra venne designato il Gen. Scuero, il Gen. Magli venne assegnato allo SMG come Ufficiale Generale addetto al Capo di SMG. La descrizione dettagliata della reale situazione in cui si trovavano nel 1941 le FF.AA. italiane, non può esulare ne essere ignorata nel contesto in cui operava l' Aeronautica in quanto parte integrante dell' apparato militare della Nazione. La conoscenza della situazione tecnica, addestrativa e operativa della G.U. del R.E. non può collocarsi in una visione incidentale e superflua di tale aspetto descrittivo, ma riveste particolare importanza per l' applicazione d impiego tattico dell' aviazione, la cui partecipazione nelle analisi dei singoli fatti d'arme, trova la sua ragione d' essere nei risultati scaturiti dalle operazioni stesse.
Si è detto più volte, nel corso della descrizione degli eventi bellici sui vari fronti di guerra, della critiche che sono state mosse all' operato dell' aviazione, critiche non di rado dettate deterministi per la mancata realizzazione del successo offensivo o difensivo che fosse; oggi una migliore ed obiettiva conoscenza della situazione addestrativa, dell' armamento ed equipaggiamento in dotazione, degli aspetti logistici e dei mezzi impiegati, può fornire ai lettori una visione più chiara e serena delle difficoltà incontrate per realizzare risultati tattici con così modesti presupposti, adottando in contrapposizione l' azione, l' intervento e i sacrifici degli aviatori prodighe nel tentativo spesso impossibile, di appoggiare l' azione dei fanti, dei carristi, degli artiglieri. Il 2 giugno avveniva al Brennero un primo incontro fra il Gen. Keitel e Cavallero per la soluzione di problemi comuni, fra cui l' uso dei porti tunisini per assicurare i rifornimenti alla Libia, l' assegnazione all' Italia di materie prime, carburante, carbone. Per l' Africa settentrionale venivano stabilite misure di rinforzo aereo (nuovi reparti da caccia), batterie c.a. (36 batterie fra pesanti e leggere), 7 batterie costiere.
Il Gen. Keitel metteva in rilievo le difficoltà di Rommel per avere a disposizione un maggior numero di artiglieria per battere Tobruk, un incremento dei reparti d' aviazione, l' assegnazione di bombe più pesanti e distruttive per avere ragione dell' ostinata resistenza nemica.
Incominciò già a manifestarsi la prima divergenza di opinioni fra Rommel e i Comandi italiani dell' A.S. e particolarmente coi Gen. Gariboldi, Gambara e Almone Cat e finì a rompere quell' armonia iniziale che aveva prodotto la riconquista della Cirenaica in così breve tempo e la pesante sconfitta delle unità inglesi. Rommel chiedeva insistentemente la costituzione di una Armata

Rommel insistently called for the establishment of an Italian-German Army completely subject to his orders in the eastern part of Libya, the non-interference of the Italian command in this area reserved for him, a broader and more effective collaboration between the headquarters of the Grande Units assigned to his Army. On the Italian side arise a covert preclusion in these attempts and were manifested in individual tolerances to readily adhere to the Italian-German Army orders issued by Rommel.

On June 22, Germany attacked the USSR and opened a new front in the war in Europe in addition to North Africa.

Previously it was done at the Brenner on June 10 a Hitler-Mussolini meeting to exchange views on the Axis war and he also hinted at a possible German attack on Russia in date since even if never forthcoming missing any Germanic confirmation of this hypothesis. The declaration of war on the Soviet Union made in the spirit of the Pact of Steel, resulted in Italy offering the Wehrmacht an expeditionary force (CSIR) with its own air force component based on fighter, reconnaissance and transport squadrons.

Once again, as was the case with CAI in the fall of 1940, Italy subdivided irrationally its forces into a distant front, hostile and alien who had no correspondence with the specific interests of the nation, ignoring the African front and preparing a Expeditionary Corps with 60,000 soldiers, more than 200 guns, 5,500 vehicles, a hundred aircraft more useful certainly in Libya and in the immense extensions of the eastern front.

It was repeated again as happened in Greece and less than a year from October 1940, an incorrect, dispersive and demagogic interpretation of the Italian strategy, aimed more towards falls outside ideological concepts, elementary and logical address of a strategic vision as the Italian, necessarily limited in its explication and in time, as set on the concentration and on the exploitation of the maximum industrial and military effort to obtain the maximum result.

The exhausting war in the Balkans and Greece had just ended, the East African front was irreversibly running out of steam, the Dodecanese front was stagnating due to a lack of initiatives, the Air Force was keeping good watch in the Strait of Sicily, the Navy was ensuring supplies to Libya and only the North African front was alive and operating to be further strengthened in view of future operations; the British had serious concerns in Iraq and the moment was particularly favorable for any more enlightened initiative considering the grave decay of the power of the English fleet of the Mediterranean was sorely tried in the month of May.

At the end of August there was a new meeting between Gen. Cavallero and Gen. Keitel and there was an exchange of views on operations in Russia, Africa and the Mediterranean.

In July Mussolini sent to Gen. Cavallero memo on the military-political situation in Italy which stated that there are two fronts in place -one in Cyrenaica and the other in Russia - and two potential fronts - France, Corsica Tunisia and Sicily and Sardinia - and inclined to the strengthening of the Eastern front by sending a second Army Corps - "not to be less than a minor state like Slovakia" and that decision more political than real, disadvantaged once again the front of N. A. on which it would be decided the fate of Italy in the Mediterranean.

In the same month from the Fuhrer was received by Mussolini a letter containing some OKW suggestions for a smoother conduct of the Axis war in the Mediterranean, increasing the activity of fighters and anti-aircraft artillery for the protection of naval bases and ports in anti-submarine combat, increased aerial convoy escort, neutralization of the island of Malta, reorganization of merchant shipping. A number of tips direct interlocutors to Italy, objectively considering that the departure of the X Fl. Korps from Sicily had greatly weakened Italy and England increased the offensive renewal with the Mediterranean Fleet, the RAF, the reactive capacity of Malta.

A concern that the Fuhrer arising from guaranteeing by the Italian Navy the influx of supplies to the Afrika Korps, from not being able to divert for the moment from the eastern front or other armored units or the Luftwaffe to strengthen the African front of which Hitler now correctly sensed the danger which ran in the established effectiveness of the English resilience.[24]

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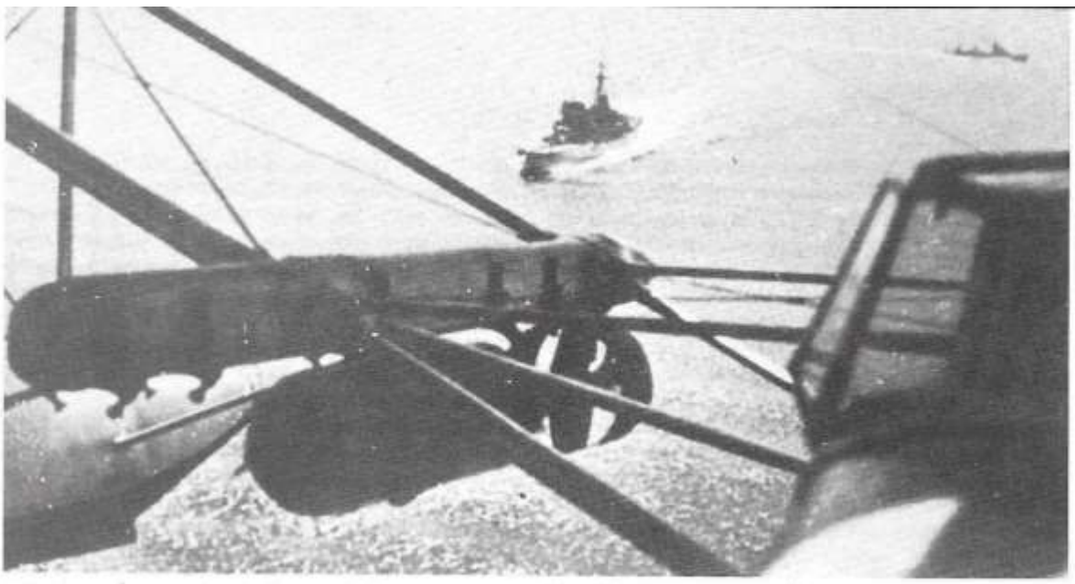

The Italian Navy committed with all its strength for transport to Libya of the Afrika Korps - a Cant.501 of the Maritime Reconnaissance escorting ships at sea.

Mussolini's answer to Hitler was formal and generic because the Duce was well aware of the situation but did not have more air and naval resources to radically turn the tide of the Italian war now established in a dangerous stalemate, in a precarious balance that could overreach at any time -positively or in negative form - only for interventions in forces of Germany or England.

Useless resulted at that time all the efforts made by the Supreme Command and the Army GS to adequately enhance the largely remaining continental Army or at least adapt quickly to the new and modern concept of mobile use, providing it with new and powerful mechanized units unfortunately remained on paper the program of Cavallero but not translated into reality for lack of views and modest production and technological possibilities.

It was a humiliating and irreversible situation aggravated by the lack of a clear and rational production policy for the war industry, lack of appropriate technological renovation of feasible projects in the short run, even by the absence of adequate employment doctrines of the armored and motorized G.U., there continue to populist projects of magnitude more based on the number of G.U. to be prepared than on the quality that they had to possess to effectively face the adversary, handicapped by inadequate training methods.

The disastrous 1940-41 campaign on Albania's mountains and desert of Libya had not yet widespread enough teachings to the leaders of the Armed Forces because of the past persisted tenacious and stubborn policy in the absurd looking for a truth to many commanders prepared and farsighted present but often rejected at the highest level in its stark reality.

In early October Gen. Cavallero enacts with the Directive n. 10820/OP. of 10/14/1941 addressed to the Chief of the Army G.S. Gen. Mario Roatta, his most important strategic initiative in the management period of his command, when aware of the importance of Malta and danger for the protection of direct supplies to Libya - keystone of any future offensive-defensive initiative - he invited Gen. Roatta to prepare a study for the occupation of the enemy fortress with the use of Army units, Navy and Air Force, and with the assistance of Germany.

The operation, which was bound to keep the airtight secrecy correspondences, service talks and conversations, would be called conventionally "Requirement C.3". In early November to coincide with the onset of the winter season in Russia, the Luftwaffe returned again to Sicily with II Flieger Korps and was newly created the 2nd Luftflotte of Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, composed well as by the II Fl. Kps. by the X Fl. Kps. and by the Fl.Fu. Afrika supplemented by the Flak units, technical and services units.[25]

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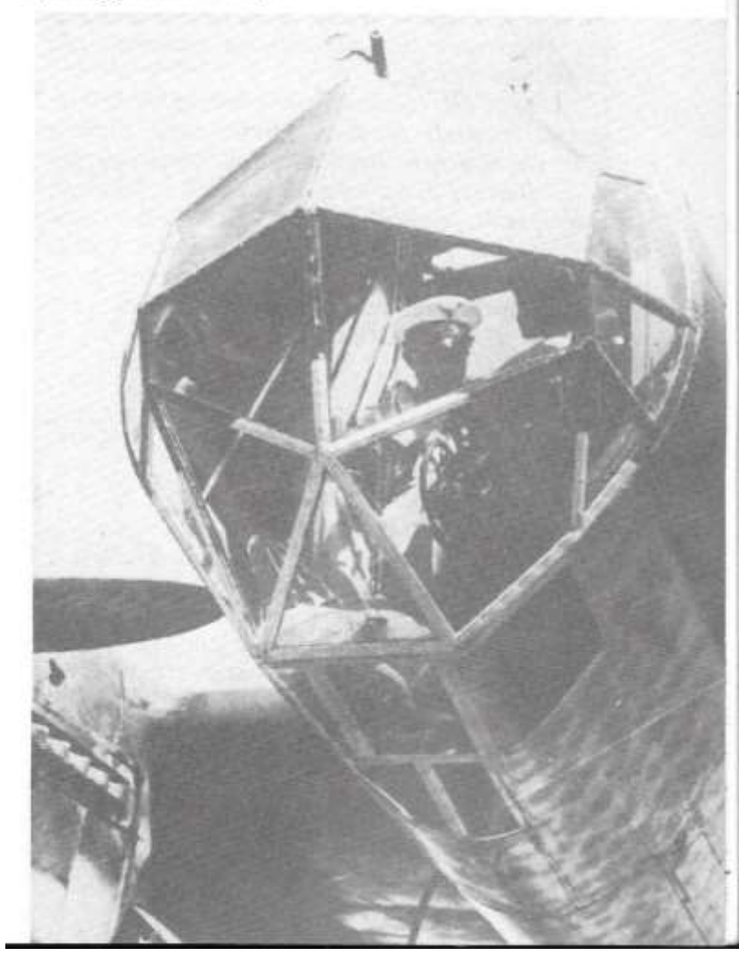
At the same time and the will of the OKW concerned about the Italian situation, was formed a German command for the South (South-OBS Oberbefehlshaber) entrusted to Kesselring and with jurisdiction over all the forces of the Wehrmacht stationed in Italy and in Africa, and the units of the Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine based between Crete and Greece.

Mussolini gave thanks to the Fuhrer for measures to strengthen the Mediterranean aimed by the depriving the Eastern Front a G.U.A. such as the Second Fl.Kps., for sending naphtha urgently required by the Navy and confirming by Hitler: "... that the Italian air force is fulfilling the task of protection and escort between Sicily and into Libya more satisfactorily, saying it also sure that the presence of a new German Air Corps in southern Italy and the islands will allow a strong, effective superiority over the enemy for the neutralization of Malta." The letter concluded with a heartfelt thank you to the Fuhrer for approval and appreciation had against Italian aviation for successes in the Mediterranean.

The Supreme Command arranged to regulate and harmonize in legal terms the pattern of the command functions and by the O.B.S operational dependencies as part of a closer and more effective cooperation on all Axis fronts in common in the Mediterranean, while maintaining the principle of dependence of the O.B.S. to the Italian Supreme Command.

Field Marshal Albert Kesselring aboard his personel Dornier. Appointed by the Fuhrer as the German air force commander in the Mediterranean and accountable to the German OKW operating in southern Europe.



In early December, the Duce informed the Fuhrer to have being prepared for the eastern front with a second Army Corps infantry divisions and an Alpine Corps both intended to strengthen the CSIR, the enormous difficulties to ensure the Libya a minimum of essential food and military supplies, the heavy losses in merchant ships and military units to ensure supplies, and the need to have more amount of naphtha.

During 1941 a number of events had troubled the life and activity of the Italian Air Force and they had marked the different stages in the positive and negative aspects arising in the natural evolution of events.

The financial aspect which regulated and fed the aviation war effort on all fronts, had been amply illustrated in the Senate by the Chief Inspector General of Aeronautical Engineers Attilio Ferrari. The total planned expenditure during the year 1940/41 ascended to £. 3,698,895,000 against planned £. 3,286,678,000 an increase of £. 412,217,000 for more war spending and what an extraordinary contribution to the abandonment of plan R .

In the construction of engines was an increasing tendency to replace those radial with another linear liquid cooled and with fuel injection.[26]

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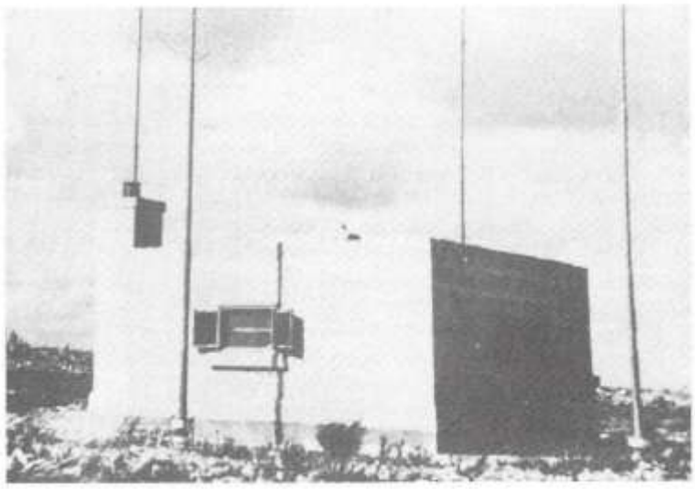

A English field mod. Metrovick type 15. In 1941, the island of Malta was still upgraded with new radar station capable of carrying out any day or night operational need.

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Improvements had been made in instrumentation, instrument navigation, and radio assistance, while no adequate solution had yet been found among the many conflicting ones regarding the type of armament to be installed on the fighters - more weapons of reduced caliber 7-8 mm. - fewer weapons of higher caliber 12/14 mm. - mixed armament 7/8 mm. -12/14 mm. - few weapons but of large caliber 20/35 mm. - with weight ratios for the ammunition of 1 ÷ 3.4 or 1 ÷ 12.6 and autonomy of fire for more weapons with reduced caliber of about 20" with large and high volume of fire (typical of Hurricane/Spitfire) compared to a greater autonomy of fire and higher ballistic distance for the weapons - of larger caliber but of reduced number.

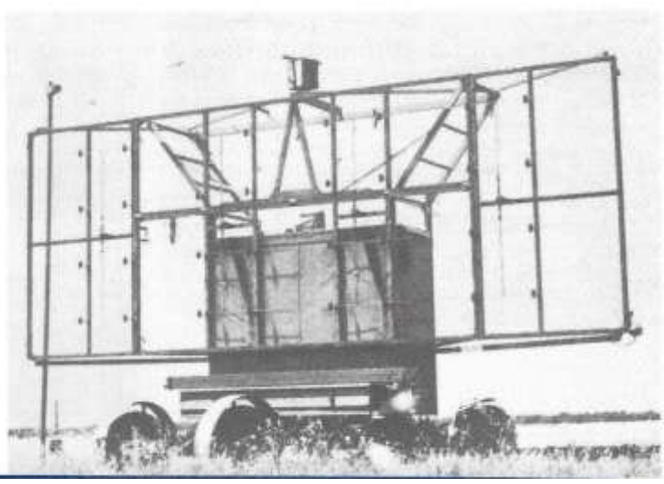
A dilemma that for many years was always emphasized but hardly realized in the Italian Air Force.

The problems of personnel for technical services were illustrated by Gen. Ferrari with contacts with the Ministry of National Education in order to have a greater number of specialized aspiring engineers, experts, technical leaders, designers; with the increase in aeronautical graduate schools to provide an additional revenue of specialists, to improve the cultural level of the young people for the Air Force.

Improvements to increase the industrial production had been initiated between the Air Ministry and the interested companies, expanding the research laboratories and experimental workshops to stimulate new projects, new production criteria, and the best performance schemes.

The report of Gen. Ferrari exhibited both synthetically and the results of Gen. Pricolo management and what had been done by the Air to overcome many difficulties and problems some of which are considered insurmountable.

The problem of flight material and personnel training greatly concerned the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. The judgment of General Von Pohl did not place excessive confidence in wooden-structure aircraft constructions and in certain types of more modern Italian aircraft such as: the SM.79, the BR.20, the G.50 and the M.C.200 which were considered by the German general to have: «insufficient stability and great vulnerability to hits»; more confidence instead was provided by the Italian engines even if negatively endowed with insufficient power which limited technical and war performances.[27]



Malta-Luqa - The "Pitry" beacon whose emissions were leading the British aircraft consigned to the Island. The radio service interceptions of R.A. of the SIA indications managed several times to divert enemy aircraft hijack to Sicily and Pantelleria. (Collection R. Caruana).

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But while the Italian Air Force was improving slowly, with great effort though their command organization, flight equipment, the training of personnel with remarkable successes in the torpedo attacks on the British Navy and numerous victories in aerial combat, became every day more and more - precarious collaboration between Gen. Pricolo and the Chief of the GSG Gen. Cavallero in sharp contrast to a form of mutual distrust established for some time and now come to the personal unbearable limits. Between June and October occurred numerous disagreements and serious differences of opinion between the two leaders of the Armed Forces, for British attacks on convoys to Libya charged per se the Air Force, for the “inability to prevent such attacks"; for arbitrary personal commitments made by General Cavallero against Mussolini for certain aeronautical problems without the knowledge of these General Pricolo and openly challenged the Chief of the GSG, as the episode about the rise of torpedo bombers specimens result in service less than the one promised by Cavallero the Duce but not confirmed by Gen. Pricolo; Another reason for dissent was the lack of preparation in the crews established of the first units of MC. 202 blocked by Gen. Pricolo before sending to Libya if not equipped with anti-sand filters so as not to repeat the serious error of G. 50 posted to N.A. at the end of 1940 went out of use quickly for grinding of the cylinders due to the sand.

Sinking of ships, attacks on aviation formations, bombing of naval bases were charged by the Supreme Command and Supermarina as the fault of the aviation for inaction and were freely the subject of criticism at all levels of General Pricolo, knowing mode and possibilities of aviation intervention, had a duty and a commitment to reject and contest.

On several occasions during the regular weekly reports with Mussolini, Gen. Pricolo had reason to complain for the bad relations existing with General Cavallero hoping for an improvement in the common interest of the nation.

The first of October Gen. Pricolo performed a visit to Germany at the invitation of Marshal Goering, journey started it with a major drawback as the aircraft was traveling - a three-engine SM. 75 -remained blocked at the commanding Emilian Apennines and forced to a emergency landing on the field of Stradella which resolved without consequence. The rest of the trip took place regularly with a Littoria Air Ju. 52 and what followed were friendly and fruitful conversations on topics of common interest such as the neutralization of Malta, the damming of the Sicilian Channel, the protection of convoys.

In talks with Marshal Goering in his H.Q. of Asiem in East Prussia, General Pricolo expounded on his memo on the strategic situation in the Mediterranean, the essentials of which were accepted and agreed fully to a greater and more effective collaboration between the Royal Air Force and the Luftwaffe.

The report included the following elements:

Western Mediterranean

Air strikes on Gibraltar for more than destructive actions of harassment because of the small number of employable aircraft, their characteristics, the distance of the objective from the nearest Italian bases.

Central Mediterranean

Serious situation for the Italian air force because of the increased reactivity of Malta continually reinforced by the enemy. Traffic of supplies difficult, risky, with heavy losses in ships, material and personnel. Air strikes of the enemies on Sicily and Libya ports. Air Staff commitment to increase convoy escorts, preventive surveys, the increase in air transport, attacks on installations of Malta. The number of aircraft involved for escort in the intervening six months between April and September of 6050 was between fighter (4161) and bomber/reconnaissance (1889); for maritime reconnaissance had been employed in the same period in 2431 seaplanes/bombers with total 8706 flight hours.

Attacks on Malta -This aspect despite the valuable contribution made by the X Flieger Korps had not produced the desired results because of the difficulty of destroying the vast, dispersed and protected enemy defensive organization about airports and anti-aircraft defenses, although good results were obtained. The optimal solution would be the conquest of the island by air-drops and landings currently under investigation in Italy.[28]

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January 1941 - The X Flieger Korps (Lt.Gen. Hans Geisler) comes to Italy. German airmen pay tribute Italians airmen killed in the war near G.S. of the Royal Air Force.

Eastern Mediterranean

It was found a significant improvement in the situation after the occupation of Greece and Crete.

In the Middle East the extension of the English territorial control of Lebanon and Syria had created political and strategic implications. The aerial situation is to the Axis in that each points, substantially balanced in others.

Remarkable results could come later to the situation that will be created on the southern front of the Russia-Black Sea-Caucasus-Armenia. The Pricolo memo was shared and accepted by the supreme commander of the Luftwaffe and put the study intervention a plan to significantly improve the situation to start since 1942. Goering insisted much because the Italian Air Force took under his complete responsibility throughout the air defense territorial, the anti-aircraft artillery, distance-sighting.

Much praise was made for the brilliant results achieved by the torpedo bombers and for the development assumed by the new specialty.

The journey of Pricolo went to inspect in Russia the CSIR aviation, and to visit Hungary, Romania, Greece, and on his return to Rome, a comprehensive report was presented to the Head of the Government approving the work of Gen. Pricolo in the delicate and fruitful mission carried out abroad.

Instead A different view was had by Gen. Cavallero who a few days later received the Chief of the Air Force G.S. to the Supreme Command, scolded him on the problem of direct air transport to N.A., according to him not up to the tasks assigned by the Stamage to the Air Force, to integrate with an effective service the influx of Libyan troops, now fully committed to aviation after the sinking of the transatlantic liners "Oceania" and "Neptunia" loaded with soldiers and the prohibition of Mussolini to transfer more troops to Libya by cargo ship.[29]

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Unfortunately, the SAS despite the great efforts and the sacrifices made by the crews, it was not yet able to meet the widest extent possible for the troop transfers in the shortest time required for a number of serious problems: insufficient number of three-engined SM. 82, aviation fuel shortages in Libya caused by the sinking of an oil tanker, the need to use some transport planes to carry fuel necessary to constitute at Castelbenito adequate gasoline supplies for the return flight of the SM. 82, resulting in a daily decrease in the number of trips potentially estimated at 32 per transportable trips of soldiers but actually drastically reduced the rate of 50% for the reasons of mentioned, the greatest distance traveled over Sicily and Libya course to avoid Maltese fighter attacks after some interceptions MS. 82 at the hands of "Beaufighter" suffered on the shortest route that caused losses in the SAS.

Despite these mitigating and objective justifications on the events of air transport, the conversation between Gen. Cavallero and the Chief of the Air Force G.S. reached bright tones to the point that General Pricolo saw fit to stop it coming out abruptly from the study of the GSG Chief who did on the incident report to Mussolini. The unfortunate incident of air transport for the N.A. had followed a few days later for lack of preparation of Mc.202 fighters destined for Libya, and this event was a further source of conflict and open distrust between the Chief of the GSG and Chief of Staff/RA, now stabilized at irreducible personal positions that only the authorities and the intervention of Mussolini could settle.[30]

English antiaircraft position in Malta with 94/52 gun. Even A/A artillery was reinforced above all with new Bofors 40mm weapons for the defense at low altitude.

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The inspection carried out by General Cavallero to the deployment of Macchi C. 202 of the Stormo deployed in Ciampino for a long line, was highly positive and the Chief of Staff in Gen. Pricolo, after illustrating the features of the new fighter to the Chief of the GSG, He would deliver an eloquent proof practice exhibiting flying aircraft with quick take-offs, breathtaking pull-ups, turns and ground level passages that strongly impressed Gen. Cavallero.

A pilot of the 17th group CT flew so hugging the ground could damage the radiator which forced the aircraft that leaked a visible trail of glycol to fall quickly on the field; the excessively long, however, resulted in a landing accident at a MC. 200 of the 18th Group parked on the sides of the field, which damaged the "Folgore" and consequently the "Saetta". Gen. Cavallero took care of immediately sent an officer to determine whether the pilot had suffered injuries or bruises, which actually turned out to be minor. Of course, it was a further result of the conflict on Macchi aircraft for N.A., brought to the attention of Mussolini through a memo drafted by General Cavallero at the conclusion of a series of findings made on the work of the Chief of G.S./RA and summarized failure cooperation with other armed forces, excessive command centralization of address errors in the conduct of the armed force, employment and preparation errors, misjudgment of flight material and aircraft production.

It was after the last argument of the month of October a waiting period spent in the hope that Mussolini was able to overcome the existing differences between Cavallero and Gen. Pricolo, as the Duce had pledged to attempt after an interview with Pricolo, and in this waiting time the Chief of the Air Force GS had to solve another serious matter that arose in Libya with the replacement of the 5th Air Fleet commander, Gen. Ajmone Cat who quarreled with Rommel and was replaced by Gen. Marchesi, and, in circumstance of the change of command, the Chief of the Air Force GS did not hesitate to praise the work of Gen. Ajmone Cat, being exposed with his criticism of the behavior of the Stabs of the Afrika Korps which had caused the unjustified behavior of Gen. Rommel the replacement of the commander 5th Air Fleet. Within the few days of Gen. Pricolo stay in Libya there was the tragic story of the "Duisburg" convoy and it was in that circumstance that was attributed to Air Force once again, the lack of offensive action against Force K that destroyed the night on 9 November of the 7 ships of the "Duisburg" convoy escorted by two cruisers and 10 destroyers and protected until sunset by 64 aircraft divided into 8 aircraft patrols that were alternated on the convoy for the entire day of the 8th. Having returned to Italy and resumed his usual activities, on November 14, at the end of the bi-weekly report that Mussolini had with the Chief of Staff of the Royal Air Force, the Duce, admitting the failure of his mediation to resolve the disagreement with General Cavallero, communicated to General Pricolo his decision to regretfully renounce the precious collaboration that for years he had had and had received with loyalty from the commander of the Italian Air Force, a decision taken so as not to further aggravate the already precarious situation and which General Pricolo understood perfectly.[31]

Ciampino 10/30/1941 - Gen. Pricolo presents to the Chief of the GSG 17th Group C.T. with the new MC. 202 (Lt. Col. Bruno Bramilla) of 1st Stormo destened to N.S. They note in addition to General Cavallero, Gens. Ilari, Santoro, Bonomi, Lt. Col. Brambilla, Capt. Gaspari.

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Thus, the Chief of the Air Force GS was sacrificed to the reason of state and replaced by Gen. S.A. Rino Corso Fougier.

The replacement of Gen Pricolo implicitly created an uncomfortable situation between Mussolini and Cavallero, who as a comfort and justification of the decision taken, prepared a memo on the topic.

On November 23, General Cavallero sent the Duce a report on General Pricolo, prepared on the 20th, which listed chronologically the events that between October 11 and November 19, 1941, had led the Chief of Staff to decide, in the opinion of the Chief of Staff, to propose to Mussolini the replacement of the Chief of Staff of the Royal Air Force.

Comando Supremo
The Chief of the G.S. General
Precisely for the Duce (November 20, 1941-XX)

Report of Gen. Cavallero on Gen. Pricolo (DC. SPD/ACS no. 077785-077789).

The situation in Cyrenaica was, as you know Duce, the subject of the most careful and continuous attention of the Supreme Command, as shown by yourself several times repeated. It is considered not only the action for the taking of Tobruk, but also the possibility of a hostile initiative aimed at preventing this our operation.

One of the essential problems in this field was that of aviation. The entry into service of the MC. 202 aircraft allowed us to have a prevailing fighter force in North Africa with all the possibilities that such a prevalence entails.

A) *On October 11*, the General Pricolo just returned from his trip to Germany, taken by him the examination of this problem and invited him to prepare to send in Cyrenaica of two Mc.202 fighter groups, which he assured me be ready within very short term. On this occasion I was to present to Gen. Pricolo that remain securely our preparations for the timely attack Tobruk, all our predispositions concerning Cyrenaica had since assumed the imminence of an enemy initiative was this or not confirmed by the information.[32]

Rome 11/16/1941 - Gen. S.A. Rino Corso Fougier new Chief of the R.A. Who pays tribute to fallen airmen in the day of his inauguration to the new post of manager of Italian aviation. Gen. Pricolo was replaced by Mussolini had serious disagreements with Gen. Cavallero.

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Castelbenito (Tripoli) 11/07/1941 - Gen. Pricolo the ceremony of the exchange of deliveries to the 5th Air Fleet Command, including outgoing Gen. Ajmone Cat and Gen. S.A. Alberto Marchesi successor. It was the last official ceremony before his resignation as Chief of the G.S. of the R.A.

I was very explicit on this point and the same Gen. Pricolo repeats to me verbatim my concept saying associate with it. To Gen. Pricolo I suggested to act quickly that is to immediately to send to Cyrenaica the Mc.202 group concentrated in Sicily, even if it led to break the unity of the Stormo that belonged to this group.

B) *On October 14th* I had with Gen. Pricolo a new interview on the same subject and asked him how far it was the departure of the group Macchi 202 from Sicily. Gen. Pricolo replied that the ready availability of a group of the 1st Stormo, the Stormo intended entirely for Cyrenaica, the ready availability of Sicily's group. He added that the first group of the 1st Stormo would be ready on October 20th and the second on the 27th of the same month. I explained to Gen. Pricolo my regret for the delay, however, accepting the solutions he proposed.

C) *On October 17*, I received Gen. Pricolo and Gen. Marquis, the latter departing for Libya. I exposed to both my predictions about the near enemy attack in Cyrenaica and the needs for which I had insisted on a speedy reinforcement of our aviation in N.A., in the first half, with fighter units.

D) *On 21 October* I addressed to Gen. Pricolo the following point:

"In relation to the conversation I had already requested, on the occasion of your site inspection in Cyrenaica, also examine the possibility of an emergency temporary reinforcement of the 5th Air Force, not only for sending already under way fighter units, but also bomber and reconnaissance aviation, all in relation to the planned operation on Tobruk".

E) On October 22, in a new interview with Gen. Pricolo on the subject, expounded the symptoms of a forthcoming enemy offensive in Cyrenaica and the prospect still the urgent need to strengthen our air force in Libya, in the first place fighters.

F) *On October 23* at a meeting with Admiral Riccardi and with Gen. Pricolo I repeated my predictions about a future enemy offensive in Cyrenaica and I confirmed orders for the prompt dispatch of a first fighter group, regretting the now extended delay (the first group that had to be ready on the 20th was not yet in sight); Gen. Pricolo informed me to holding in Brindisi, to send to Libya, also a Cant 1007 group and I insisted that they would make every effort to provide the necessary fuel supplies.

G) *On October 30*, I went to the South Ciampino airport, where I was met by General Pricolo, to passed in review, the first group (17th) the Fighter Stormo departing for N.A. "(As literally the invitation that I had been sent). On this occasion Gen. Pricolo assured me that the group would leave within two days, after some reorganization made necessary and told me that, in order to hasten their departure, according to my orders, he would waive, for this group, the application of anti-sand filters.

This is the background today (20 November), the group that I have reviewed on October 30 is found again at Ciampino. I have been informed by Gen. Fougier the 18th.

Yesterday, the 19th of this month, while I was receiving General Pricolo on a farewell visit, I asked him about the failure of the group in question to depart. He replied that the first delay had been caused by the bad weather that had occurred in the first days of November and that, moreover, having conferred on the matter with General Gambara on site, he had concluded that the dispatch was not urgent and had therefore arranged, after his return from Cyrenaica, for the application of sand-proof sockets to the equipment. [33]

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Of this decision and the resulting orders, Gen. Pricolo back from Cyrenaica on the 8th current and only replaced on the 14th, gave me the news, I stressed during his farewell visit on the 19th.

As for the second group of the 1st Stormo, which should have been ready on October 27, it is still moving to Milan.

I ordered to Gen. Fougier, new Air Force Chief of Staff, to provide with all urgency to sending to Cyrenaica today as there is available in terms of fighter units and Gen. Fougier gave me this morning news of a pressing appeal Gen. Marquis, who, from Cyrenaica, urges the same urgent referral.

I can not, Duce, not to tell you the seriousness of these facts, especially as, with regard to the conditions of the time, from October 30 to date the start of the fighter group could be made not once, but several times (the rest is party and returned the same Gen. Pricolo). And I must also highlight how effective this *disobedience to orders* of Gen. Pricolo received from the Supreme Command has put our forces in Libya in less efficient conditions at the precise moment when, as I had repeatedly and strongly warned, occurred in Cyrenaica an important initiative to the enemy offensive against us."

* * *

The command period of Gen. Pricolo 1939-1941, delicate and difficult period that could be called readjustment, was marked by significant positive and negative events at the same time, but nevertheless were of great use to the Italian Air Force because they provided a certainly more real and true look than that found at the time of command he took office in 1939, when he found a substantially more eye-caching situation.

The radical change in the command of Senior Staff of the Air Force hierarchy decided by Pricolo, though he had initially thrown a stir in the Army, was later accepted and assimilated by the new and old leaders commands of the Air Force Grande Units and ZAT, the directions and services the Ministry, the regulatory and experimental bodies; suppression perhaps hasty of certain graduate schools was modified with the subsequent recovery of those regarded as useful for the professional preparation and complemented by other new institution that gave a more modern face of Italian aviation; he put a brake and production limits the proliferation of unnecessary and outdated aircraft prototypes, new models some few successful and others are revealed negative and can not be used in war roles, they created new, more efficient specialties and feared, they prepared it the first torpedo units and linear motor fighters, are they increased transport, is experienced new and more efficient fighter aircraft to counter the enemy technological change, they created with the Germanic allies more efficient technical collaboration tools, operational and coordination, passed with great sacrifices serious problems that had given rise to dramatic situations in several areas of war, is formulated new partnerships with the industry quite different from those of the past, they greatly expanded the financial allocations to meet changing demands of war. A huge work described briefly but ascertained in detail the various chapters that contain the activities of all the Italian Air Force in the second year of the war.

The new Chief of Staff in Gen. S.A. Rino Corso Fougier took the lead at the date of 15 November 1941 and the same day he was appointed Secretary of State for R. Air Force.

Fougier came from the fighter specialty, unlike Gen. Pricolo who had made his career mainly in bombers.

During the war, from June 1940, Gen. Fougier had subsequently held: the post of commander of the 1st Air Fleet, Commander of the C.A.I. and later President of the CIAF where he was replaced by Gen. Renato Mazzucco.

The advent in command of Gen. Fougier coincided with the Fuhrer's decision to send Italian reinforcements consisting in II Luftwaffe Flieger Korps (Gen. Bruno Loerzer), in the constitution of the new Luftflotte 2 of Field Marshal Kesselring, the OBS institution to coordinate and harmonize the activities of the entire Reich in Southern Europe and Africa.[34]

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It was a great event in the strategic aspect and operating since the Axis organization was suddenly strengthened in the Mediterranean with a contribution of more than 500 combat aircraft, with great personal experience of war from the eastern front, with aggressive units of Flak, services, logistics and technical, with renewed enthusiasm to face the common enemy and bacteria with decision and determination.

It also had a positive clarification in dependency ratios, as Gen. Cavallero refused to make available to the OBS the Italian Armed Forces located in the south of Italy, desiring to retain the necessary freedom of action and decision-making while harmonizing operations and intentions in a common policy with the German Armed Forces inserted by the OBS, including even nominally the Afrika Korps of Rommel and naval units in the Mediterranean (submarines, torpedo boats, submarine chasers, mine sweepers, transport).

There were some changes in the existing command structure and commanders: they were given an OBS/CS liaison office entrusted to Gen. Wanninger, replaced the commander of the X FI. Kps. Gen. Geisler with Gen. Von Waldau already a aeronautical attaché in Rome- constituted in Sicily an operating advanced command called Flieger Fuhrer Sicily (Col. Roth), established in Messina the headquarters command of II FI. Kps. Analog Office of the GS/RA established at OBS, officially called the "Office of the Italian General at the OBS" was given to Gen. B.A. Cerutti Marziale assisted by Col. Sergio Lalatta, by Maj. Philip Milo Villagrazia, by Capt. Alfredo Reyer, by a group of interpreters and personal services.

A specialist sergeant was put at the disposal of General Ritter von Pohl for the maintenance of aircraft assigned to the Italuft - a FW. 58 and a Siebel FH. 104 (acronym SG-GB).

Commander of the Italian flight section at the OBS was named Lt. Col. Antonio Fieramonti. The changes registered with the Italian Air Force were limited to the following: Gen. Renato Mazzucco to CIAF, Gen. Ajmone Cat to the General Command of the Schools of R.A. To 1st Air Fleet was assigned Gen. Tedeschini-Lalli, the 2nd to Gen. Porro, the 3rd to Gen. Ilari, the 4th was confirmed Gen. Ranza, the 5th to General Marchesi who had replaced after a few days by Gen. Ajmone Cat. Also General Santoro was reappointed as Deputy Chief of the GS/RA.

In place of Gen. B.A. Aldo Urbani to the Minister's Cabinet, was appointed Col. Giuseppe Casero. Gen. S.A. Mario Bernasconi was appointed Deputy Chief of the SM Aircraft Armament, General Giovine was placed at the disposal of the SM for subsequent assignments.

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For the operating cycle performed between 1940/41 were awarded the Order of Savoy the following Military officers:

General S.A. Gennaro Tedeschini Lalli (Sicily)
General S.A. Felice Porro (Libya)
General S.A. Ferruccio Ranza (Albania)
General S.A. Eraldo Ilari (Greece)
General S.A. Rino Corso Fougier (Channel)
General D.A. Umberto Hood (Aegean)
General D.A. Gino Sozzani (Albania)
Col. Michael Grandinetti (Mediterranean)
General Hans Geisler (Sicily)
Col. Martin Harlingausen (Sicily)[35]

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The entry into the war of Japan and the US

The approach of Japan to the Rome-Berlin Axis was manifested gradually since 1935, at first with military agreements signed with Germany the same year, with the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1936, signed the following year by Italy after the cessation of military assistance and aeronautical supplies to China had created the best approach conditions in the Italian-Japanese relations. As a counterpart to the waiver of that form of assistance, Japan bought aircraft equipment from Italy in 1937 for 182 million (72 BR. 20, ammunition and parts material), another 10 BR. 20 in 1938 for L.26 million, machine guns and ammunition to 13 million in 1939, of fabrications weapons and licenses for guns, ammunition and bombs up to 1942 for a total of 64 million lire.

The September 27, 1940 was signed in Berlin on Tripartite Pact between Germany, Italy and Japan implemented after hesitation, mistrust and mutually resentments exchanged between Germany and Japan to the bilateral treaties signed without the knowledge of each other with the Soviet Union in 1939, after the bloody clashes in Manchuria in Chang Kufeng and Nomonhan in the river area Halghin Gol, which ended with ups and downs and losses on both sides.

Dissipated partially mutual distrust within the framework of common interests, there was a more proactive approach to the Japanese political and strategic assumptions of the Axis and Hitler he pointed out to the Japanese the possibility of an attack against England in the Far East - with Singapore as the goal, not to give time for the US to intervene in South Asia, although excessive reserve maintained by Germany with other members of the Tripartite on the attack the USSR, it had resulted in the German behavior, an unexpected agreement between Japan and the Soviet Union a five-year neutrality pact. One of the worst mistakes of the conflict in the relations of the Tripartite result of a policy of distrust and lack of coordination in the municipalities of alliance relationships.

The Japanese occupied southern Indochina with the consent of Vichy and in the month of July 1941 in Berlin addressed the pressing solicitations to Japanese to attack from behind the Soviet Union, though without obtaining consents and insurance for such an initiative, as Japan now been involved for many years in an exhausting war with China's Chang Kai Schek, linked to respect a recent pact of neutrality and from the most important political and strategic interests in South Asia and in the East Asian League.[36]

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The Japan-UK relations had been long set with mutual coldness, due to a significant enhancement of the Imperial Japanese Navy to face in Asia the British, Japanese political ambitions to help Asian peoples under the British rule, particularly India and Burma, which showed obvious signs of impatience yearning for the independence.

There had been a political and military strengthening of the British strategic positions in Asia and a series of military agreements between Britain and the Dominions of Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands who had major economic interests in Asia also to protect and defend.

To cope with the situation in South Asia, Japan obtained without offsetting any commitment to protect the territorial integrity of Indochina and neighboring Thailand, which had clashed with the French of Vichy, the sale of bases in the north and south of the countries aforementioned places partially under his patronage and came dangerously close to the British strategic influence area arousing serious concerns and well grounded alarm.

More difficult, however, were relations with the United States, with which there had long been strong friction and tension over control of the Pacific, with the strategic bases of Hawaii, Midway, Wake, Guam and the Philippines under American control, countered by the Japanese mandates in the Marianas, Carolines, Marshall Islands and Formosa.

The war in Europe and the creation of the Tripartite convinced the United States to formally take a definite political position, siding with England and the Commonwealth and issuing about a series of measures including in chronological order of time we find the “Neutrality ACT“ of November 1939 in which every nation (sic) could theoretically obtain supplies of US war materials to transport at your own risk from American ports to its destination (in practice it benefited only the UK), the sale in early 1940 to Britain of 50 "Mothballed" destroyers for escorting convoys carrying war materials from the United States of the "Neutrality ACT” - Destroyers symbolically transferred in exchange for bases in Bermuda and the West Indies for remote security of the United States; The "Lend and Lease ACT” of March 1941 (Rent and loans) and as if not enough all the 42 unique circumstances created in favor of England, were made operational naval commands in the Atlantic and the Pacific.

The escalation towards war President Roosevelt went on a regular basis; first with the convoy escort of "Neutrality ACT” Direct in England, provided the escort for half way by the US Navy and taken to the other half by the Royal Navy that saw reduced to 50% its commitment and its naval potential, then with greater US commitment.

To avoid a second “Lusitania” case Hitler ordered the U. Boote avoid any provocation at about between 60° and 30° longitude, but the American President did not disarm all his intentions about expanding to 300 miles the limit of territorial waters .

On April 9, 1941 US troops occupied Greenland which belongs to Denmark, without any authorization from the Danish Government, by the establishment of air-naval bases of support and control over the northern route of the convoys; July 7 the American escalation realized another important milestone in the war when units of Marines landed and occupied Iceland -still under Danish nationality - by the establishment of other strategic bases in "the US defense". No reaction from the Axis.

The same month the Japanese occupation of Indochina, which took place as described above with the lawful consent of the Vichy authorities and with a diplomatic Japanese compromise guarantee of future incidents with Thailand, raised protests from the US; Roosevelt warned Japan not to "continue a policy of “provocations” and decreed the embargo of petroleum products and aviation engines have long ordered.

On August 14 Churchill and Roosevelt in Newfoundland signed the "Atlantic Charter" for peace in the world, based on the confidence that they could offer to all by the two great nations.

Took place between September and November, clashes between German submarines and ships of the U.S. Navy escorting convoys. And also in the European sector, the situation became alarming!

On September 4, President Roosevelt ordered the U.S. Navy to attack any "foreign vessel" (surface or underwater) that attempted to approach the "Neutrality ACT" convoys, based on the "Cash and Carry" method (pay and take away) coming from the U.S. and headed for England, thus increasing the possibilities and risks of intervention by the United States and better safeguarding the war materials of the "Lend and Lease Act" from Axis attacks (n. 572 ships for 2,800,000 GRT sunk in 1941 by Italian-German submarines, incr. auxiliaries and Luftwaffe aircraft).[37]

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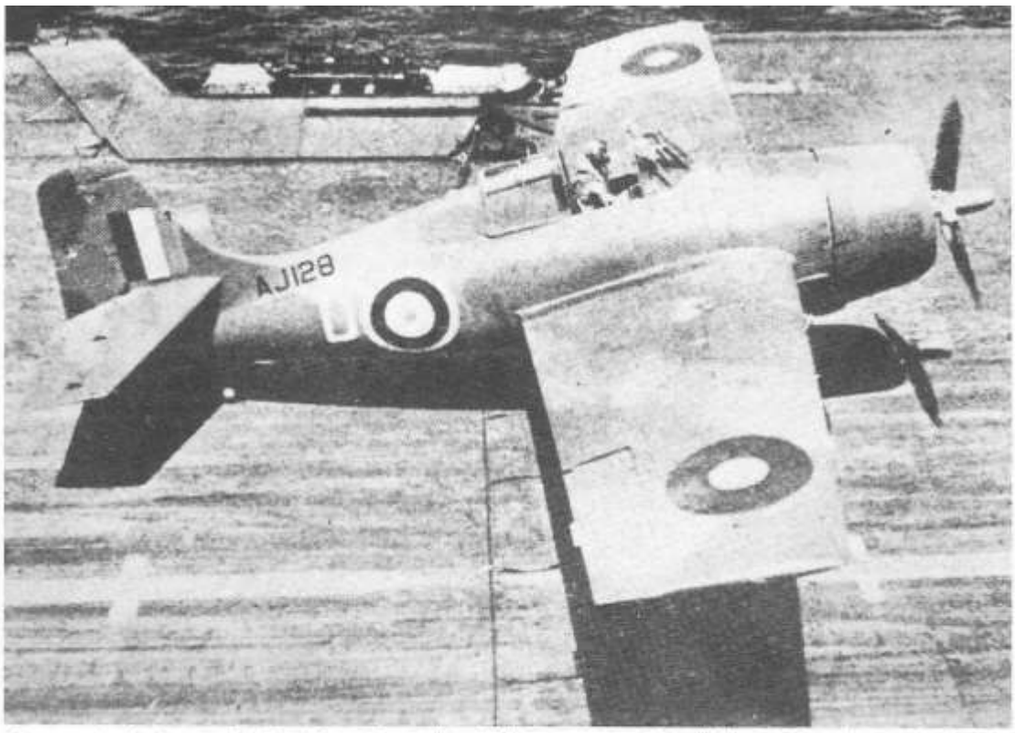
08/14/1941 - Meeting between President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill to enact the "Atlantic Charter" a demanding allegiance to all democratic countries to safeguard the principles of freedom and democracy.

11/14/1940 - The President of the U.S.A. F.D. Roosevelt signed the "Cash & Carry Law" that allowed military supplies to all orbiting nations in political and strategic sphere of action of the "Great Democracies".



A first example of application of the "Cash & Carry" Law - A "Martlet" (Grumman F4 F4 "Wildcat") fighter ceded to the FAA and embarked aboard CV to replace the outdated "Sea Gladiator" and "Fulmar" (speed Km. 512 - Km autonomy. 1240 - 6 cal machine gun armament. 12.7).

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Once again the Fuhrer ordered the U-Boats not to attack American ships even if provoked and avoid accidents that actually occurred but were not exasperated.

A Japanese attempt to improve relations with the United States failed due to the intransigence of the US government and the failure caused the fall of the moderate Konoye Cabinet replaced by more determined and energetic government of Gen. Tojo, certainly less accommodating than the previous one that tempted anyway , in extremis, an agreement with the US it was informed on November 26 of a threatening Roosevelt ultimatum containing humiliating conditions that anyone would reject, in the words of Secretary of State Cordell Hull, who called it verbatim: "... studied and advanced to derail in every tense political with the specific aim of passing the thorny issue by diplomacy into the hands of the Chiefs of the GS. "

The joint Chiefs of Staff of the US Armed Forces honestly did his best to postpone the ultimatum also trying to do to change, but it was too late to stop the machine put in motion by President Roosevelt whose end result could not produce nothing but war. A belated message from Roosevelt to Emperor Hirohito came too late to change the decisions of the Tojo government.

The time of Pearl Harbour was approaching menacingly!

English air forces present in South Asia: Burma, Singapore -Hong Kong-Australia, the Air Marshal Pulford command included about 500 aircraft from RAF, RAAF, RNZAF and FAA in different conditions of use and about 150 aircraft Royal Dutch Air Force deployed in defense of the Dutch Indies, many of them like those of the old RAF models and reduced efficiency.[38]

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The Imperial British Navy's upgrade programs envisaged a number of aircraft equal to 582 examples for the defense of Burma, Singapore, Hong Kong - all of recent models - but the bulk of the RAF and Dominions forces were deployed in the most important war theater of the Middle East.

The US Air Force in the Philippines had 277 aircraft including 35 B. 17 "Flying Fortresses" and 107 fighter Curtiss P 40, while among the Hawaii, Midway and Wake were located another 412 aircraft of all types – the aviation for the Navy amounted to 2 CV with 170 planes on board and another 100 airplanes between fighters, bombers, reconnaissance and transportation divided among the possessions of the Pacific. Another CV was available for possible use in the Pacific.

Japanese air forces were divided as those of the US, Army Aviation and Air Force of the Imperial Navy, and was prepared to this and efficient air power that was given by the Japanese government commissioned to attack the US fleet in the Pacific with an sudden Tsushima type operation, and react with weapons to provocative anti Japanese policy pursued consistently by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

On December 8, 1941 at 06:00 hours it began the operation "Tora Tora" with the departure of a first wave of 183 Japanese planes between bombers, dive bombers, torpedo bombers and fighters took off from 6 CVs making their way on the island of Oahu (Hawaii) headquarters of the largest US air and naval base of Pearl Harbour. At 07:55 the first Japanese bombs fell from the sky on American ships at anchor (94 naval ships including 8 BB., 2 CA., 6 CL., 29 DD., 5 submarines and other support vessels) fortunately they were absent the CVs "Saratoga" and "Enterprise."

At 08:40 arrived on Oahu the second wave of 167 Japanese planes that brought to 350 the total number of aircraft of the Imperial Navy launched on Pearl Harbour.

They were hit all 9 BB three sunk permanently (Arizona, Oklahoma, Utah) 2 BB. were also sunk and as "Littorio" and "Duilio" in Taranto night, both the "West Virginia" that "California" were recovered and returned to service; the "Nevada" was burned severely, the "West Virginia", "Tennessee," "Pennsylvania" were damaged. 3 light cruisers, 3 destroyers, 4 auxiliary vessels Sunk and 7 minor warships were damaged. With this traumatic and managed the Japanese surprise attack could destroy the backbone of the US Pacific Fleet and fully gain the strategic and operational superiority. Among the Americans there were 2335 dead and 1143 wounded servicemen.

About 349 planes present in Oahu airports, 188 were destroyed and 159 damaged (99.8%) and another 6 planes incoming to Hawaii were lost.

The Japanese lost 30 aircraft with 55 pilots and specialists, 5 pocket submarines and 9 members of crew. A minimum price realized with surprise policy, strategy and tactics.

The Tripartite and Japan Declared war between 8 and 10 December: England, the Netherlands, China and also the day Germany and Italy declared for consistency with the commitments, war on the United States.

The advent of Pearl Harbour, which gave the conflict a truly global dimension, was superficially implemented in Italy by public opinion, accepted without any particular emotion or rather not immediately evaluated in its real significance; both US intervention alongside England against that of Japan in the deployment of the Axis, had not in poplar media at the grassroots level the importance they deserved, probably because of some reasons that we should expose:

1) Lack of knowledge of the Tripartite Pact and in particular of Japan, compared to Axis between Italy and Germany.

2) Distance to the new front of war from Europe, from Italy and the Mediterranean.

3) A widespread statistical ignorance, economic and financial of industrial and military power of the US and ignored military and strategic possibilities of Japan generally undervalued.

4) A random and superficial feeling of typically homegrown optimism, deemed adequate to also adequately the of the new potential danger overseas.

5) The supposed, the remote possibility of a direct US military intervention in the Axis war, and particularly in the Mediterranean.[39]

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Under the strategic aspect of Japan going to war would entail, supposedly logically, a attack on the Soviet Union on the front of the Far East, from Korea to Manchukuo, from Sakhalin to Vladivostok; They would be cut in this way the US supplies, threatened the eastern borders of the USSR, accelerated the collapse of the Soviet Union military and war close on two fronts, threatened the borders of India, fomented riots and rebellions in the British and Dutch.

Against all logical predictions and expectations, the feared Japanese attack on Russia did not occur. The Japanese forgot or pretended to forget the serious incidents of 1939 on the Halghin Gol River in Manchuria and the bitter defeats suffered at the hands of the Red Army. A consideration that will not exempt the USSR from sneakily attacking Japan in August 1945, agonizing over the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

Was perpetuated by such behavior, another serious strategic miscalculation in discordant and independent of the Tripartite policy, to be added painfully in Dunkirk, the armistice with France, the non-occupation of Malta and Gibraltar, the “Battle of Britain”, attack the USSR: errors that would have weighed negatively to a decisive extent on the outcome of the conflict.

We were soon in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, a series of Japanese victories overwhelming: the conquest of Malaysia and Guam, the Philippines and the invasion of Wake, the fall of Hong Kong and Singapore, the occupation of the Indies Dutch and the attack on Burma to India, makes it easier the slogan "Asia for the Asians."

At Sea were sunk by Japanese aviation the BB "Prince of -Wales" and "Repulse" sent as reinforcement from the Mediterranean, and that was in addition to the American battleships at Pearl Harbor.

From began to the end of 1941 the strategic and military policy of maximum dominance of the Tripartite launched the offensive on all fronts with large and promising results.

* * *

The German offensive on the Russian front had not reached the end of 1941 and the expected results by the Führer and by the OKW under the strategic aspect, military, political, economic and industrial.

There were undoubtedly great victories during the rapid advance in European Russia and undeniable results had been obtained by the Wehrmacht who had put out of action about 7 million Soviet soldiers, captured or destroyed not less than 30,000 guns, 25,000 tanks, 16,000 planes, great resources into raw materials and industrial facilities, but also big errors of judgment were made and that we can state the following:

a) political and military misjudgments about the strength of the Soviet regime and the military efficiency of the Red Army.

In this field the OKW and in particular the Dienst Abwehr had underestimated the power of the USSR, recorded together with big surprises, serious loses.

b) Mistaken economics valuation and technical-industrial potential of the USSR, proved far more developed than expected and able to prepare good top war material in certain cases, better than the German equipment and available in great quantities.

c) Measurement Error on moral and patriotic qualities of the Russian people who had made the invasion in a compact and unitary form, except for certain populations that did not fit to the origins, customs and traditions of the Bolshevik regime.

d) strategic and tactical setup Errors due to obtaining political results and the application of tactical doctrines which in the past had provided decisive results, but did not obtain the necessary contrast to Russia for the reduced defense opposed by the Soviets, intent on retreat in the heart of Russia as was already done with Napoleon.

e) errors of assessment on the Red Army's ability to carry out rapid changes of cavalry units into armored units, opposing the Wehrmacht and the more surprised Information Service, an unexpected mass of at least 20 new armored divisions operated by an excellent and prepared General Staff.

f) error of assessment in considering possible win before the arrival of the winter season in Moscow and Leningrad - political campaign war objectives of Germany.

g) Unpreparedness of the Wehrmacht to face the Russian winter for lack of appropriate personal and material equipment, especially for motorcycle-armored vehicles, lack of preparation that would have caused the beginning of the serious crisis of the 1941-42 war campaign. [40]

* * *

40

In the Mediterranean and in North Africa, Italy, the weakest link of the alliance with Germany and Japan, was laboriously trying to overcome with great efforts and sacrifices the serious problem of supplies to Libya - the keystone of any subsequent initiative offensive-defensive - dangerously threatened strangulation from ships, submarines and British aircraft.

The safeguard of the Yugoslav artery still tied with thin but tough filaments to Italy, allowed the survival of the German-Italian Army of Africa pinned at the edge of Sirtica by the new British offensive: a dramatic moment of the Italian war that was fortunately passing between anxieties and fears of all sorts. 1941, the year of the steadfastness and the great events of war, was now at the end![41]

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CHAPTER TWO

The war in Libya
North Africa

Libya 1941 -The Axis counter-offensive in Cyrenaica -The enemy organization in the Middle East - The siege of Tobruk - The Western Desert Royal Air Force - Summer Battles Operation "Brevity" - Operation "Battle Axe" (Hatchet) -Changes in the 5th Air Fleet - Operation "Crusader" - The support of WDAF war operations - The offensive resumed – The Start of the British "Crusade" - The 5th Air Fleet during "Crusader" - The retreat to Sirtica - Considerations and tactical results -Transportation aircraft in Libya.[42]

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Libya 1941

The year 1941 was presented on the North African front with the negative results produced by "Compass" that had led to the destruction of the 10th Army, the loss of Cyrenaica and Sirtica, the serious defeat for Italian arms, the removal of Marshal Graziani held accountable but blameless for the disaster.

He had lost much of the military potential of the Fourth shore and seriously damaged the moral standing and strong-willed spirit of the Armed Forces of Libya.

The situation was particularly difficult and fed standard apprehensions on the residual possibility to further deal with the enemy offensive push, if by chance it was merely possible for the English bring into the fight new and fresh mechanized units and other R.A.F. squads after the forced the arrest by O'Connor of the Western Desert Force on the edge of Sirtica.

The Army and the Air Force of Libya had suffered proportionally the more loses and the very inefficient command had been unavailable to control the situation, waiting for the expected arrival of reinforcements from the Motherland urgently required by the Supercomando A.S.I. In this dramatic juncture, with the destiny of Libya was hanging by a slender hope, the Supreme Command saw fit to accept the repeatedly offered the German military aid, including mechanized Grande Units and units of the Luftwaffe to re-establish the military situation through the right technical-military balance sufficient to meet any further enemy ambitions.

The decision of the Supreme Command has long assessed and evaluated in many sensitive issues, was finally regulated with talks, details and additional protocols, agreements between the parties concerned and finally implemented with the transfer from the Reich of the German Africa Corps (DAK) under the command of Lt. Gen. Erwin Rommel - expert in panzer units -who for some time was training at Grafenwhor and a German Aerial Corps (CAT) under the command of Lt. Gen. Hans Geisler, separate from 5th Luftflotte of Norway and consists of units including bombers, Stukas, destroyers, fighter, transport, reconnaissance, squadron of liaison-exploration, rescue at sea and Flak.

He began to arise in the relations between Italy and Germany, a new and more fruitful collaboration intended to substantiate the military alliance and to give concrete meaning to the Axis war.[43]

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Germany's presence and participation in the Mediterranean and in Libya had become indispensable not only because of the disastrous course of the war against Greece but above all because of the consequences that had arisen from that campaign, which justified, required and favoured, willingly or not, the interference of the Reich in a war chessboard that the political-military agreements of the Axis attributed as a priority and assigned entirely to the Italian sphere of political, strategic and military influence.

German participation with the presence in Romania and Bulgaria was initially addressed to the Balkans (Yugoslavia and Greece) to form, in the intentions of the OKW, a safety zone behind the planned deployment set against the USSR, and to ensure the safety of the Romanian oil-rich area, but also had a great importance to strengthen the strategic aspect to the English struggle in the eastern Mediterranean, expand and refine the Germanic diplomacy with neighboring Turkey and neutral, politically represent a magnet for Arab peoples of the near Middle East who were clamping at the bit, impatient for the British and French presence in the subject areas and were intended now and rightly so, to national independence. Completing and strengthening the strategic-political-military framework of the Reich in the Mediterranean, also greatly contributed the presence of a German expeditionary force in Libya and spread the important German air forces between Sicily and North Africa, are needed to enhance, supplement and operate effectively alongside the Italian Armed Forces the politics of Germany.

The war effort of the Axis, of which Italy in just 8 months of struggle had proved, without warning, as the weakest link in the dangerous and Italian-German strategy, deserved and advised this investment now more necessary than ever.

The German military contribution in the Mediterranean proved from the beginning of great importance, since it re-established soon that the apparent equilibrium relationship, which, sparked at the beginning of the conflict, had been seriously affected by military defeats that had shaken confidence and hopes of many Italians.

The presence of the DAK with its powerful Panzer units and that of the Luftwaffe with its efficient and fearsome combat units and Stukas, at the time guaranteed the territory of the Fourth Shore, mutilated up to the Sirtica by enemy occupation, from any further danger, since and it is good to point out to avoid any artificial illusion in this regard, the residual Italian forces remaining in Libya with the scarce and inadequate armament they possessed, would not have withstood a new offensive that the British 8th Army could launch as soon as it had reorganized and equipped itself with new units and more numerous and powerful armored vehicles and aircraft traveling via the Cape of Good Hope towards Egypt coming from England and the United States, in a tight race against time.

The transfer of DAK from Italy to Libya is to be considered as one of the most important logistical and organizational strategic successes of the Italian Navy, as it took place quickly, efficiently, and without significant losses, immediately obtaining the praise of Gen. Rommel and the dutiful applause by the Italian Supreme Command and the OKW.

The transfer and transport operation was prepared and facilitated by heavy attacks which Malta was submitted to by the X Flieger Korps and the RA, attacks that greatly diminished the offensive and English exploratory activities with scouts, leaving only a few submarines the burden and the responsibility of the offensive conduct of maritime war.

Also the navigation of convoys was guaranteed by naval formations and by continuous air escorts insured by Italian and German aircraft, complemented by wide-ranging reconnaissance of Marinavia seaplanes of Sicily and Libya.

At the first onset of the Luftwaffe in Libya had been a serious accident for misunderstanding identification, when February 5, 1941 a twin engine Ju.88 of the 1st Staffel (F) .121 flying reconnaissance over Castel Benito for a layout survey, it was attacked by mistake by 3 Italian fighters who had not recognized the German. Sergeant major pilot Nowak was wounded reported that the amputation of his right leg while the twin-engine suffered extensive damage.

It was necessary to establish a common badge of optical identification consists of a wraparound white band painted 2/3 of the length of the fuselage.[44]

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Transported from the Italian merchant ships escorted by the Royal Navy, the Deutsche Afrika Korps arrive unscathed in Tripoli with its powerful armored units. Deployment of the 15th Panzer Div. A comforting show after so much bitterness.

The Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces N.A., Gen. of Army Italo Gariboldi watches the unloading of the DAK. At his side General of Panzer Troops Lt. Gen. Erwin Rommel, commander of the German Africa Corps.

Fighter Air escort to naval convoys CR.42/MC.200 with departures from the fields of Trapani, Pantelleria and Tripoli, were carried out in distances varying between 150-160 km from the bases and integrated for the greater ranges of the twin engine Bf.110/Ju.88 of the C.A.T., under the coordination of information between Sicily Navy Command and Aeronautical Sicily, received additional information on the situation also from X C.A. T. command from Catania while others He.111 and SM.79 aircraft would carry out anti-submarine missions on the Naples-Palermo-Tripoli axis; outside of that route would have acted the Cant.501/506 scouts. Were particularly heavy protective cruises on naval convoys carried out by the 53rd Stormo C.T. with its CR.42 engaged in exhausting escort missions, from sunrise to sunset, in 2-hour shifts.

Between 7 and 17 February, 12 steamships transported to Tripoli the 5th Light Div. with 9,300 men, 2,000 vehicles, 2,400 tons of materials, 160 cannons. There were some sporadic attacks by "Fairey" torpedo bombers equipped with ASV but not produced no effect. At the same time another 30 ships departed in escorted convoys from Italy to Libya or they returned, with damage to a single merchant units torpedoed by a submarine. Only on February 22 was lost the steamer "Tripcovich" with followed of the 25th by the cruiser “Diaz” sunk by the submarine “Upright” were rescued 145 castaways of the 633 men that made up the crew. A heavy sacrifice paid by Italian sailors to DAK.

Between the second half of April and the first ten days of May was also transferred to Libya the 15th Panzer Div. together with smaller units, logistics, technical services, health services and programs by completing the recruitment of the DAK. Only in April were landed 80 M.13/41 and 120 between German Panzer III-IV. A great result guarantee of success.

A vibrant message of thanks and congratulations for the successful operation which ended only with low loss, was addressed to Supermarina by Adm. Weichold, Chief of Naval liaison mission in Italy (Verbidungstabes beim Admiralstab der Kgl. Italienischen Marine) for the success of the "Sonnenblume Ubung" (Operation Sunflower).

Between 6 February and 25 May had been initiated by Italy to Libya and vice versa a good 283 Italian ships and 109 German cargo vessels, which in the course of navigation had suffered 33 attacks by aircraft, surface ships and submarines with the sinking of 15 ships, a cruiser, 2 destroyers, 1 torpedo boat (among the ships lost were 8 German steamers).

On February 10, Marshal Graziani passed the Comando Superiore ASI to General Command Italo Gariboldi who also assumed the regency of the General Government of Libya, then officially confirmed on March 26 with his appointment as Governor.[45]

A miscellaneous honor unit of the DAK parades through the streets of Tripoli the "step of an hour" - Behind the striking aspects of the German military formalism emerged the solid and concrete structure of the powerful apparatus of the Reich War.

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The new top of the Libyan commander Gen. Italo Gariboldi, at a military ceremony in Benghazi with Italian-German officers. Right in colonial uniform Gen. S.A. Mario Ajmone Cat Commander 5th Air Fleet.

On February 13 Rommel, accompanied by the Deputy Chief of the Army G.S., Gen. Roatta flew to Sirte for a survey on the front lines, realizing the person of particular operating theater of Northern Africa to survey the forward positions, to study the situation on the ground, evaluate and set up a joint-use program with the Italian Armed Forces.

The German decision to intervene in Libya matured slowly in Stamage after 4 offers of military collaboration were unjustifiably rejected by Marshal Badoglio, could not be considered since the beginning as a modest and temporary mistakenly wrote some authors of military matters which repeatedly supported the “hypothesis of a German disinterest and consequently the Fuhrer for the Mediterranean theater of war", conversely, as the course of subsequent events as well as the material grandeur of participation will testify irrefutably, Germany had wisely evaluated its participation, presence and political importance , military and strategic in the Mediterranean, a decision upheld several times by the Chief of Staff of the OKW Gen. Jodi, who saw in the presence of units of the Wehrmacht a tranquility and security guarantee for the southern borders of the Reich, albeit indirectly, whose assumptions were facilitated by the failure of Italy's strategic competence, proved no longer up to support politically, militarily and diplomatically a role of such exceptional importance.

The first step of this gradual assumption of authority had been in December 1940 with the Pricolo-Milch agreements, for sending to Italy of a German Air Corps (X CAT) 290 airplanes strong between bombers, assault, destroyers, fighter, transport, connections supported by Flak units.[46]

First meetings between German and Italian soldiers in the land of Libya. The DAK initially included 2 mechanized divisions, special antitank forces, recon; technical - logistical, and men, guns, tanks, vehicles.

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DAK also flowed with its aerial units of tactical support called "Flieger Fuhrer Afrika" under the command of Maj-Gen. Gustav Froelich made up of bombers and, Stuka, destroyers units. A twin-engine Bf.110 of 26th ZG. (Zerstore / destroyers Group).

The second step that involved Superesercito occurred in late December with the Gandin-Jodl agreement which provided for the participation of an expeditionary force in North Africa (DAK) consists of 2 mechanized divisions, smaller units and related services for a total of 30,000 men; the third German entry was planned in Albania with the use of Alpine troops but did not materialize to make way for the preparation of more complex and decisive action of "Marita". The whole and articulated complex of German operations in the Mediterranean in collaboration with the Armed Forces Italian conglomerate in the subsequent Guzzoni- Keitel Agreement of 11 February that sanctioned and regulate the German participation (document no. 6339 of 11-2-1941 of Stamage).

The analysis of the political and Italian military failures and the results of the humiliating defeats suffered on the battlefields of the war and the negative forecasts were stimulants elements that led the supreme direction of the Italian war to revise concepts, strategies, policies, organizations and institutions that the evidence shows they had a right to the effort demonstrating gaps and uncertainties, had also noted dysfunctions or inadequacies that it was necessary and urgent required to correct, replace, modify, substitute for.

In addition to the implemented transformation of Stamage to accommodate and harmonize the efforts of Italy into the war, General Cavallero worked a number of substitutions in the high command, set up new offices and services at the GSG, expanded organic summit of the control and activated concretely the birth of the Supreme Command that until then had lived formally and symbolically giving little as a useful contribution to the nation at war.

The task faced was huge because of the numerous and serious difficulties to each existing level and the need to profoundly change the strategy adopted so far proved unsuccessful and contradictory, either by the prediction proved false by a rapid and positive solution to the conflict, Look for the absurdity to set strategically and politically a short-term war and then extend it and make it more difficult to place with the attack on Greece demonstrated as completely useless, of unpreparedness direction on every level, contradictory, invasive and superficial.

But nothing was to be considered yet lost because there were positive in Italy, intellectual and volitional energy, industrial and technical resources and military capabilities, willingness to be levied to overcome any crisis and tackle with greater determination and renewed commitment to a war that lay ahead now certainly longer and difficult than in 1940, but certainly not illusory. To this add after, positively, the end of the parallel war of the Axis and the decision of the Fuhrer to operate in the Mediterranean alongside Italy; a commitment that this was bound to spur the Stamage-Supreme Command to be compact and prepared in the best psychological, moral and efficiency, to loyally work together with the ally Germany, the achievement of the common objectives of the Axis.

The transformation of the Stamage was equally urgent and important not only for the best conduct of the war by Italy but above all for the expected comparison with the tested and efficient command organization of the OKW where the acute intelligence and professional preparation of General Cavallero intuited and evaluated the probable reasons for collaboration and dissent, the disparity of views, the points of agreement and the weak and vulnerable sides of the Italian High Command.[47]

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DAK also came with the "Ariete" Armored Div. with an endowment of mixed L.35 wagons and M13/40 tanks. It was the first major mechanized units sent by the Army GS to North Africa for the war in the desert.

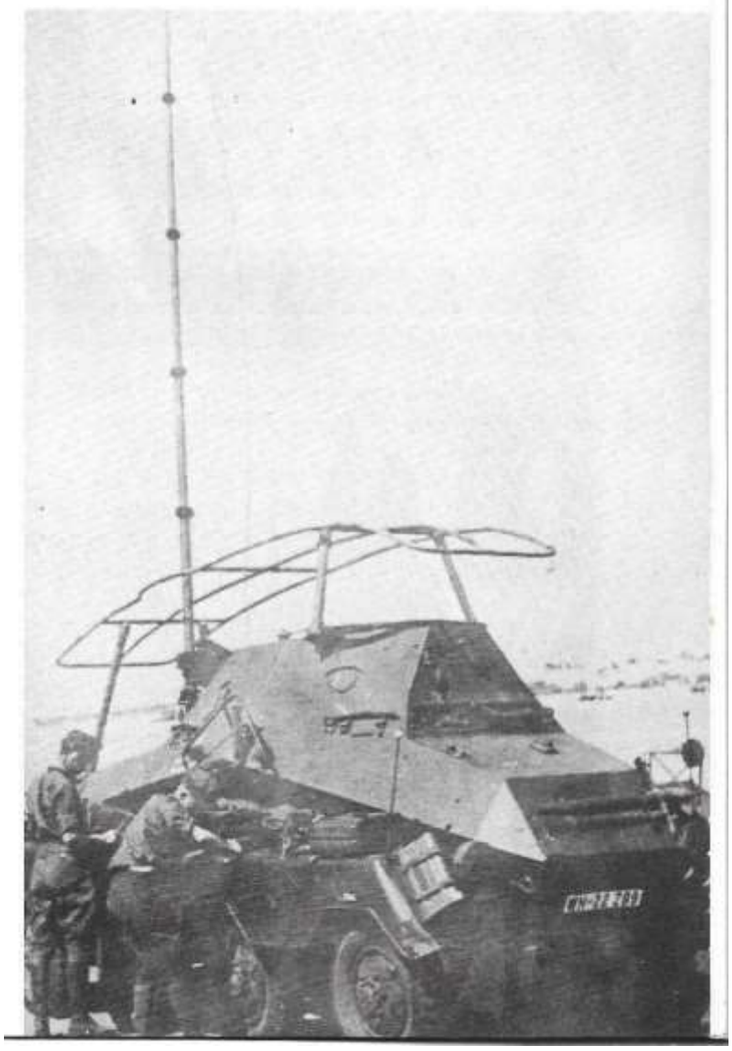
The Deutsches Afrika Korps (D.A.K.) to whose command had been appointed Lieutenant General I.G.S. Erwin Rommel, resulted partially located the date of 20 February in Tripoli with 5th Light Division, 3rd recon unit with armored cars in Sirtica, a mixture group of Flak, sappers units, health, transport, Feldgendarmerie, Intendenza around Tripoli .

The arrival in Libya of the first contingent of DAK was strangely escaped the careful English surveillance and only on February 24th the Commander-in-Chief for the Middle East realized that the German presence was not only symbolic as it was supposed, but rather consistent and dangerous.

This error of judgment had previously induced General Wavell to strip the WDF of its defenses, to transfer the 4th Indian Infantry Div. to the East African sector, other units to Greece with the newly formed Expeditionary Force, to withdraw from the line the veteran but tested 7th Armored Div. and replace it with a recently formed tank brigade: a series of elements that contributed directly or indirectly to the positive debut of the DAK.

The Italian units of Tripoli were still being completed and reorganization since only 11,000 soldiers of the 10th Army and national Libyans had managed to avoid capture of about 140,000 who were overwhelmed by the English offensive; 49 field guns, 17 anti-tank, 13 20 mm. machine guns, 60 mortars, 460 automatic weapons, was what had saved as armaments of the 10th Army annihilated in eastern Libya.[48]

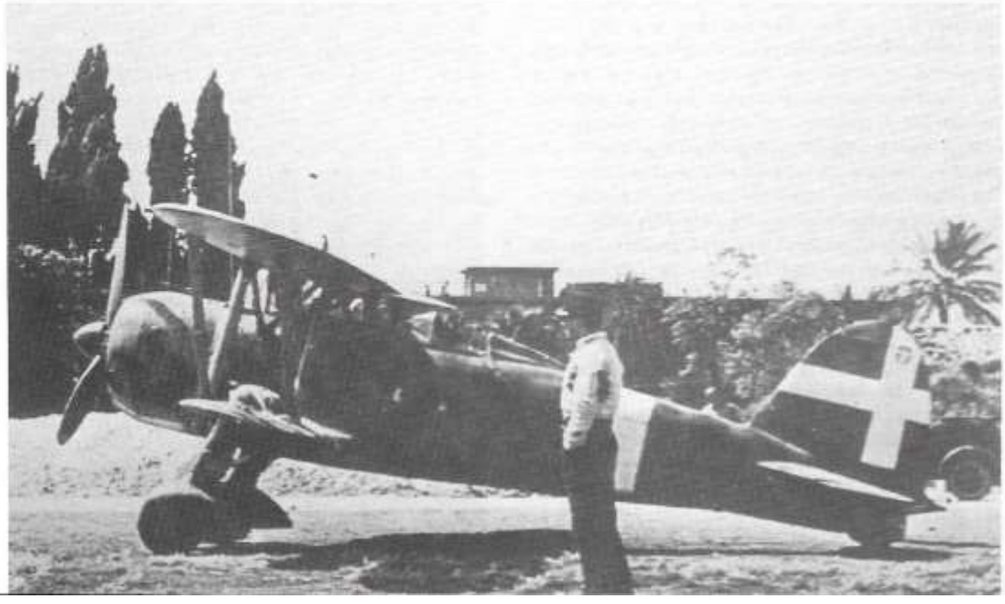
The DAK immediately take the tactical initiative by sending into the desert armored exploring units. An armored car mod. Sd.Kfz. 263 raises the long radio antenna to communicate the situation to Rommel.



48

Appear along the "Balba" the first way finding of DAK to visually indicate the new situation in North Africa. The commander of the 1st/532nd Recon Battalion, Capt. Kock at the Arc of Fileni.

A CR.42 of 151st Group CT based in Tripolitana. at the beginning of the Rommel's offensive the R.A. Libya had 8 groups, 53rd, 54th, 96th of bombers (BT). and 2nd, 18th, 23rd, 151st, 155th of fighters (CT).



The counter-offensive of the Axis in Cyrenaica

The enactment of the Directive No.22 /OKW by the Fuhrer "on 11 January, 1941, was the official act for the beginning of German participation in the war in the Mediterranean, and represented a new twist in the now common Axis war strategy.

On February 6, the first German units left for Italy and the 16th of the same month landed in Tripoli in a surprisingly short period of time, made possible thanks to an excellent effort and organization on the part of the Italian Navy.

Previously, since January 10, the X Flieger Korps units had, initiated, that unbroken series of air strikes in which the protagonist was the Luftwaffe in the Mediterranean - both in Sicily and in North Africa - and then gradually spread to other sectors of use and whose intervention gradually and progressively enhanced, will make a decisive contribution to the fight against England’s navy and air force.

Protocol. -11-2-1941 6339 was signed by the Gen. Keitel for the OKW and Gen. Guzzoni for Stamage, regulated the use of German troops on the Italian theaters of operation thus:

1) The tactical Dependence of the Commander, Italian on the spot. Command dependence on the German Commander designated in connection with the local Italian commands.

2) Use of organic units to complete division level. Exceptions permitted only to the German commander.

3) The use of German unity must remain united and not divided into different sectors of the fighting front.

4) Faculty for the German commander to inform the German General of connection to the Italian Supreme Command and the Fuhrer through the top commander of the Wehrmacht, to report if the task entrusted to the German units were to lead as running a serious failure and consequently a decrease of the German troops prestige.

5) The German X Air Corps will remain in the employ of the Air Force Commander of the Reich Marshal Hermann Goering, who with its specific guidelines impart operational provisions in close cooperation with all interested Italian commands.[49]

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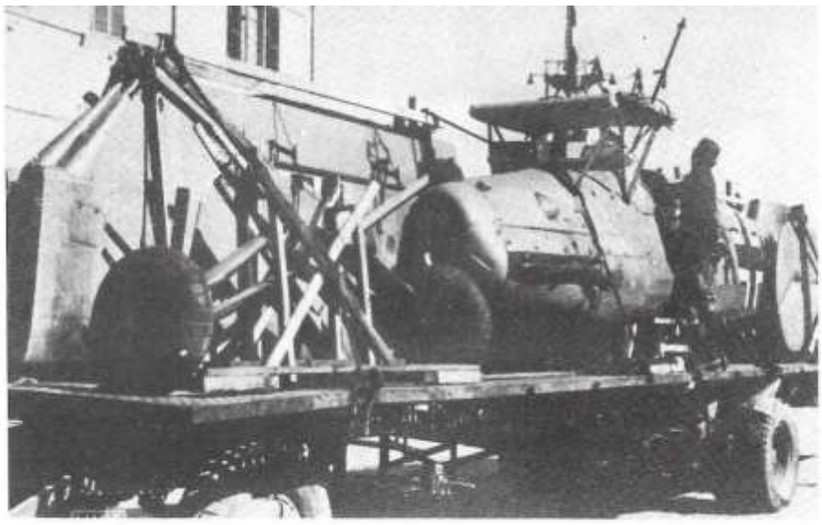

An recon/tactical aircraft observation Henschel HS. 126 just landed from an Italian ship in the port of Tripoli. You notice the special trailer with the whole plane disassembled for transport.

On 17 February the GSG with directive n. 6510/Op. specified the constitution, composition and dependence of the «Rommel Armoured Corps» (D.A.K. + X Army Corps), various Italo-German units and units from the Italian 5th Army Command (Gen. Italo Gariboldi) although it did not go into details regarding the contribution of the Italo-German air force, the use of which was vague and lacking operational specifications, since while the 5th Air Fleet (Gen. S.A. Mario Ajmone Cat) was confirmed as being under the control of the Italian NA High Command, the Flieger Flihrer Afrika (Gen. Frohlich) instead depended for its use on the X Flieger Korps Command (Gen. Geisler) with its headquarters in Sicily, but was tactically assigned to the DAK.

Thus they came to be created from the start a dysfunction and control and operational differences in serious injury to the cooperation of the land operations, despite having faculties the Commander of the 5th Air Fleet to forward directly to the intervention requests to Fl.Fu.Afrika, with the right of the German command to join or not to the Italian request.

Though from a formal point of view, this limitation could produce negative or below expectations, from a practical point of view it must be stressed that on Gen. Frohlich was maintained from the outset in close and personal contact with the Gen. Ajmone Cat, committing himself to participate with heartfelt collaboration in the air competition for the support of the Italian-German land forces.

On February 17, the first exploring elements of DAK were already operating on the spot in front of over 500 km from Tripoli and had been in the Nofilia area with first fleeting contact with the British avant-garde.

The first impression Gen. Rommel brought against the Italian Armed Forces was positive from the human aspect, very critical of the material supplied; in a report drawn up by him for the Army GS he wrote: "... very old guns of the 1914-18 war, model 1891 rifles, lack of machine guns in the infantry, tanks of 3 tons simply ridiculous, worn-out airplanes with pilots who must do wonders, old Caproni reconnaissance, helpless and slow, just deadly for those who fly, empirical and rudimentary torpedo bombers" and he continued:" the only living thing is the value and courage of the pilots: our aviator would certain refuse to fly with equipment here, rightly called "coffins." Lacking in its view also appeared individual and collective training of Italian soldiers.

In the report produced by Stabs/DAK and presented to the High Command ASI for the attempt to improve the Italian weapons and strengthen the unity of the first line assigned to him, Rommel suggested: "assigning motorized artillery, the use of armored car recon squadrons units supplemented by aerial observation, the increase of the Bersaglieri Regiment fire, assigning engineers Battalions for mechanized Grande Units". Criticism but truthful report Rommel was not much appreciated by Superesercito and the German general answer was received by High Commander Armed Forces ASI Gen. Gariboldi, who stated:[50]

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«the Italian situation was at the time unchangeable and that any operation attempted or planned by Rommel's Armoured Command had to be evaluated and compared with the capabilities and possibilities of action of the Italian units», which for Rommel was equivalent to blocking or at least significantly slowing down the DAK's capacity for action, thus dangerously creating a serious moral and technical prejudice that would have fatal repercussions throughout the entire African campaign and that would make the DAK appear «artificially» as the only or at least decisive antagonist of the British 8th Army technically equivalent in terms of shock and manoeuvre force, material employed and capacity for action to the Deutsche Afrika Korps.

On 1 March 1941, the High Command ASI had at its disposal of the following forces: the "Brescia", "Savona", "Sabratha" (being dissolved), "Pavia", "Bologna" Inf. Divisions, the “Ariete” Armored Div., national and Libyan smaller units. A total of 130,000 men, 5,450 guns, 1,037 guns of which 119 A/T and 196 A/A, 209 tanks and armored cars (mostly type L.3 /35), 5,270 vehicles, 1,714 motorcycles, 7,464 draft animals, 140,000 rifles and SMG, 56,000 c^3 liters gasoline and 37,000 diesel. German forces included the 5th Light Div. with 9,300 men, 2,000 vehicles, 111 cannons supported by FI.Fu. Afrika with a hundred planes between Ju.87, Bf.110, He.111, Ju.88.

The consistency of the 5th Air Fleet after the serious losses between December 1940 and February 1941, was in the process of gradual recovery with the arrival of new units from Italy and the completion of those in the G.U.A. workforce and including as of the date of 1 March 1941 the groups listed below:

53rd Gr. Aut. BT -26 SM.79 (Maj. Pilot Rosario Di Blasi) Castel Benito/Tauorga.

54th Gr. Aut. BT -13 SM.79 (Maj. Pilot Giuseppe Colavolpe), Misurata.

96th Gr. Aut. B.A. T. -10 Ju.87 (Maj. E. Ercolani) Misurata.

175th Sqd. RTD -7 SM.79/Cant. 1007 Bis (Capt. Pilot Pietro Benato then Capt. Raffaele Cantarella) Castel Benito.

151st Gr. Aut. CT -29 CR.42 (Lt. Col. pilot Raffaele Colacicchi) Sorman / Bir Dufan.

155th Gr. Aut. CT -28 G.50 (Maj. Pilot Luigi Bianchi) Castel Benito / Misurata.

18th Gr. Aut. CT -29 CR.42 (Maj. Pilot Ferruccio Vosilia) Sirte / Tauorga.

2nd Gr. Aut. CT - 20 G.50 (Maj. Pilot Giuseppe Baylon) Castel Benito.

Were in the process of returning the 23rd Fighter Group, which would be replaced by 22nd departing from Ciampino as anticipated by the GS/A.

64th Gr. DA (Sqd. 122nd/129th) between Mellaha and Brak with 6 Ca.311 (Capt. Pilot Giuseppe Goggi then Capt. Giovanni Bertoni).

67th Gr. DA (Sqd. 33rd/115th) 1 Ca.311-6 Ro.37 (Capt. Pilot Giusto Ebhardt then Capt. Giovanni Minervino). 145th Sqd. RM (Tripoli/Caramanli) 10 Cant. 501 (Capt. Nicolò Albanese).

1st Gr. APC -12 Ca.309 "Ghibli" -Misurata/Mellaha (Capt. M. Pozzati).

2nd Gr. APC -18 Ca.309 "Ghibli" -Homs (Lt. Col. Pilot Dreste Andrei).

Saharan Battalion -20 Ca.309 "Ghibli" -Homs/Hon (Lt. Col. Pilot Michele Leo then Lt. Col. Mario Moreschini; commanders of Sqd. Capt. Bruno Coppola, Capt. Romeo Antonio, Lt. Vittorio Maccabruni, Lt. Alfredo Cappellini).

And also 4 Squadrons equipped one with several health aircraft: SM.81, SM.82, SM.74, SM.75, Ca.133 and 614th Sqd. rescue with 2 Cant.506.

A total of 56 bombers, 96 fighters, 73 reconnaissance planes, 26 multi-engine transport for a total of 251 airplanes. Compared to January-February which marked the lowest and alarming index of efficiency, the 5th Air Fleet had shown remarkable stamina and the will to regain the possibility of action and initiative. The whole of the Axis forces could deploy between Tripolitania and Sirtica ascended to about 350 aircraft of the first line, this strength deemed sufficient by Stamage to address any lingering ambitions offensive by the British.

However, the scarcity of fuel available in Tripolitania was extremely worrying, as was the almost total lack of technical and airport equipment which prevented or seriously limited any flight and operational activity to the point that in the period 10 February-25 March it was possible to carry out only about ten offensive bombing missions between Benghazi, Derna, Giarabub in addition to the normal aerial reconnaissance: an unacceptable proportion which demonstrated the crisis that the 5th Air Fleet was going through, severely tested by the previous operational cycle.

In this period the most intense activity was explicated by the FI.Fu. Afrika which repeatedly attacked Benghazi, Derna and Tobruk hitting numerous military and merchant ships and sinking the destroyers "Stuart" and "Dainty".[51]

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The situation slowly began to improve starting from early March with the arrival from Italy of materials, aircraft, personnel in place were sorely tried by long months of war in the desert.

It was possible to conveniently equip the airfields of Bir Dufan, Buerat, Tamet, Tauorga, Sirte, En Nofilia, Misurata to be allocated to the expected Italian-German units.

The material came from Italy included housing for 2,600 people in tents and shacks, technical equipment, field workshops, compared materials, essential supplies: fuel, lubricant, bombs and ammunition, transport vehicles and special.

Despite the feverish work of preparation carried out, but it was not possible to guarantee at the time the arrangement and operational activities of the 8th Stormo BT whose transfer was announced by GS/RA and only the 27th Group was sent to N.A. on April 4.

The 18th Group Aut. CT (Maj. F. Vosilla) arrived for the second time in Libya (had been used temporarily in August 1940 - author's note) January 29, 1941 coming straight from Belgium via Frankfurt -Monaco -Verona - Treviso - Caselle - Capodichino - Reggio Calabria -Pantelleria -Castel Benito after the dissolution of the successful CAI.

The atmosphere found in Libya was depressing and worrying due to the retreat from Cyrenaica and reigned considerable nervousness among the commands although there were admirable examples of calm and lucidity, confirmed by numerous episodes of self-sacrifice of pilots and specialists arriving by the dozen from Cyrenaica, leading to safety aircraft of all types, with disheveled engines and in bad way but saved though at the risk of life. The airport of Mellaha was literally crammed with hundreds of planes piled up on the sidelines.

The rescue operation of the aircraft had cost some deaths among pilots and specialists, many wounded and bruised (the staff of the 85th Sqd. alone carried 16 CR.42 from K.2 of Benghazi and had a wounded pilot and two bruised for 6 touchdown turnovers due to ill-turn motors and controls (author's note).

In the first fortnight of March, the GS/DAK prepares an evaluative situation on the theater of N.A. in view of the likely offensive resumed against England, a relationship that could be summarized thus:

1) Valuation of enemy forces (5 Div. Cyrenaica, 7 Div. all the way to the Delta, 5 Div. In the Canal).

2) Offensive -Limited or general -from carried out in the spring because of the weather.

3) The purpose of the attack - conquest of Cyrenaica as a prelude to the attack against Egypt (Alexandria, Cairo, Suez Canal).

4) Italian Guarantee part of the necessary reinforcements and supplies of materials with the use of the Celeri Divs., of the Air Arm and Navy warship that will be made available for the continuation of the offensive towards Egypt.

5) Valuation of enemy forces in Cyrenaica on the basis of the information received: 3 armored Regiments, 6 armored scout Regiments, 2 motorized Battalions, 6-9 artillery groups, 9 Inf. Battalions and 6 field artillery groups.

Valuation of Axis forces: 2 Div. Motored-armored of DAK reinforced by 4 armored units, 1 exploring unit, 7 motorized Battalions, 6 artillery groups; 1 Italian armored Div., 2 Motorized Div., 3 Inf. Div. the X Army Corps.

6) Aviation: 1 Sqd. distant exploration, 1 Sqd. tactical observation, 1 Sqd. connections, 1 Group Ju.87, 3 Groups fighter-bombers, 2 bombers Groups, 3 Transport Groups.

7) Logistics services: motorized columns in that wake of the troops (carrying capacity 2,160 tons), motorized columns for arrears deposits (carrying capacity 5,400 ton), advanced transport aircraft for troops of the 1st line service (carrying capacity 720 tons), water columns (500 m^3 transport capacity).

8) Organization of connections with Italian and German transmitter units assigned to different units.

9) Control of the rear, surveillance and clearing prisoners, recovery of the captured material.

10) Operating equipment: 15 days supply of fuel, 10 of food, 3 days, ammunition, spare materials.

11) Shipping necessary to carry 35-40,000 tons of supplies with a percentage of losses measured at 50%.

ORDER OF BATTLE OF THE ITALIAN ARMED FORCE. (1 APRIL 1941)

High Command Armed Forces.-ASI and its top employee commands:
Intendenza AS, Auto [transport] grouping, Armored Div. "Ariete", Div. Mot. "Trento".
X Corps: Inf. Divs. "Pavia"," Bologna "," Brescia".[52]

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XX Corps: Inf. Div. "Savona", sectors of Zuara, Homs, Libyan Sahara.

4 Army Art. Groups, 6 A/A Art. Groups including 2 of 88/56, 2 Army Corps Art. Regiments.

18 Battalions of engineers, 28 field hospitals, 2 motorized maneuver groups, national and Libyan garrison battalions, coastal batteries, units of services and Border Guards.

The anti-aircraft included six groups of RA, MACA and Milmart with 6 x 76/40, 77/28 4, 1 x76/45, 3 x102/35.6 x 88/56 gotten from Germany while for the coastal defense units in addition to the RN, who had 8 batteries 149/35 and 190/39 and 6 anti-landing Battalion of the MVSN and two reinforced infantry Libyan companies.

The Libyan Sahara command included the areas of Hon, Ubari / Serdeles / Ghat, Murzuk and Zella with 24 rifle companies, machine gunners, sappers and artillery supported by units of the Saharan APC Battalion 11 x "Ghibli", 7 x CR.42, 6 x SM.81, 1 x Ca.133.

The most worrying aspect of the situation of the Italian Armed Forces once again concerned the lack of armoured vehicles, considering that the only armoured unit present in Libya - the Ariete - had 117 L.35 tanks and 46 M.13/41 tanks, which were 75% insufficient and useless to face the British armoured units, as the very sad past experiences must have taught.

In March, the 5thAir Fleet was further strengthened with the arrival of the 98th Group. Aut.BT (Maj. Pilot Ivo De Wittembeschi) with 14 BR.20 that began for the first time in N.A. and the allocation of 5 20/65 batteries provided by MVSN for the protection of airfields. With the arrival of the twin-engine Fiat was possible to start the night missions against ports and air bases of Cyrenaica allocating instead the SM.79 and Cant.1007 Bis to terrestrial strategic exploration and maritime surveillance, with occasional daytime use on prepared terrestrial defenses and motorized columns, while the fighter units were assigned, in principle, to the Fl.Fu. Afrika for escort of Italian Ju.87, Stukas and Bf.110 destroyers given the absence at that particular season of German fighters in Sicily assigned to the escort of X CAT.

The completion of the DAK for the transport of which were 15 convoys occurred in the space of two months, had seen an influx into Libya of 25,000 men, 8,500 vehicles, 26,000 tons of materials. The operation started between February and May, ended with the loss of 31,000 tons of shipping a very small percentage compared to the total tonnage deployed.

The event that would significantly change the military situation in the Mediterranean, was marked by a warning to the French Vichy authorities from English, where they are held responsible for allowing safer navigation in Tunisian waters, with the intimation that from that time the Mediterranean Fleet felt authorized to violate the areas under French control to intercept Axis convoys.

Already in April Adm. Cunningham had decided to send to Malta the 14th DD Sqd. (Jervis, Janus, Mohawk, Nubian) commanded by Capt. P.J. Mack to counter the Axis navigation and a first night attack took place in the night of the 11th in collaboration with submarines and "Swordfish," with the sinking of four ships to 14,350 tons, The death of 350 German soldiers, the loss 3,500 tons of materials and 300 vehicles.

Beginning in April, the FAA "Swordfish" began to drop mines in the approaches to the port of Tripoli while was increased the endowment of "Wellington" to attack the Libyan ports at night.

Not content with these measures, considered too small, Cunningham sent in night of 25 April, the M.F. with B.B. "Warspite", "Barham", "Valiant", the CV. "Formidable" 4 CL. and 13 DD of the fleet into Libyan waters preceded by "Wellington" bombers and aircraft of the 830th Sqdn FAA dropping flares. At 05:00 hours the ships preceded the fire on Tripoli prolonging it for 40 minutes and firing 1978 large caliber shells for a total of 530 tons.

The attack provoked surprise and lack of initiative by the Axis because only two aircraft were sent to the area but the carrier born “Fulmar” managed to divert the aircraft. Only in the day of the 27th the war report of the Armed Forces G.S. announcing the air-naval attack, which caused 101 deaths and about 300 wounded.[53]

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The enemy organization in the Middle East

The presence of the dreaded Luftwaffe in the Mediterranean had as first unfortunate consequence for the Mediterranean Fleet serious damage to the CV “Illustrious” hit by Stukas of X Flieger Korps on January 10, 1941, by the sinking of the CL "Southampton" the next day and for Malta a number of heavy and destructive attacks that significantly reduced the defensive and offensive ability of the English fortress.

It was necessary to move into the Mediterranean the CV "Formidable" in place of "Illustrious", sent in for repair with work that will be held for over 8 months, to replenish the operational capacity of M.F.

The land situation in the M.E. and East Africa sector saw the 4th and 5th Indian Inf. Div., the 1st South African and 2 African Divisions (11th/ 12th) engaged against the A.O.I.; in Cyrenaica was attested the 13th Corps (Gen. Blamey) (7th Arm. Div. - 6th Australia Inf. Div.), in Egypt the 2nd New Zealand Inf. Div. and British 6th, the latter available for a planned operation against the Dodecanese (Op. Hercules), and also the Polish Brigade and the 2nd Armored under preparation and completion which provided with of a armored Regiment equipped with Italian M. 13/40 tanks deemed slow, unwieldy and poorly comfortable and efficient.

It was in an advanced stage of setting up an expeditionary force for Greece (6th, 7th Australian Inf. Div., 2nd N.Z., the Armoured Brigade and the Polish Brigade).

For Governor General of Cyrenaica was appointed Gen. M. Wilson and military commander of the area Lt. Gen. Neame with headquarters based in Barce while Lt.Gen. O'Connor was the military commander of Egypt.

The WDAF had been the Q.G./RAF Cyrenaica (Col. L.O. Brown) at Barce which provided as fighter of 3rd Sqdn. RAAF at Benina and the 73rd of Hurricane at Bu Amud, the 55th of Blenheim to Maraua, the alarm sections of the 6th Sqdn. At Barce and Ajdabiya then transferred to Antelat and Msus with Lysander and Hurricane aircraft

It was not possible to activate a warning system (radar sighting system) in Benina area, due to lack of trained personnel assigned to the RAF M.R.U. (Mobil Radar Unit) and such failure prevented the timely departure of alarm of the Hurricane fighter sections.

Depots for WDAF had been set up in Benghazi, Derna, Tobruk, Barce, El Magrum.

In Egypt was being reorganized the 202nd Group with two squadrons of Blenheim and two Hurricanes and Lysander pulled back from Cyrenaica to be used as air component constituting the British Expeditionary Force to Greece.[54]

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An important decryption body for Axis radio messages had been implanted for the British Armed Forces in the town of Bletchley Park in Buckinghamshire and operators working at deciphering the results generated by the *Enigma* cipher machines which were equipped with the Italian-German command, while the encrypted messages were being put decrypted by the code breakers instructed by G.C.C.S. (Government Code and Cipher School). As it regards specifically the Italian Air Force, the *Ultra* service was activated from 1941 with the installation in the Mediterranean of type Y stations detection that facilitated the local decryption task and only particularly difficult to interpret messages were passed to Bletchley Park.

While the R.A. thanks to the use of its elaborate ciphers and the operational capillarity of its units remained largely immune from immediate danger in the course of operations, the Navy had not equal fortune in the encoded radio transmission and many ships were sunk sometimes, as in the case merchant, even with the knowledge of the exact composition of the load transported insistently sought and impressed with determination from ships and enemy aircraft.

During 1941 the organization "U" (Ultra) was improved and expanded in the Middle East and was of great use to the RAF by providing texture and location of the units of R.A. with weekly reports referred to for convenience are a few tables of March/May:

ROYAL AIR FORCE - FINDINGS DISCUSSED BY SERVICE U.

	March		May
Bombers	555	591	578
Fighters	580	675	635
Land reconnaissance	283	257	268
Maritime reconnaissance	210	217	225
	1628	1740	1706

	Fighter	Bombers	Recon. Land	Recon. Mar.
Italy / Sicily	375 (415)	280 (310)	139 (139)	155 (155)
Sardinia	36 (36)	50 (30)	9 (9)	30 (30)
Aegean	37 (52)	40 (40)	-	15 (15)
Libya	70 (65)	130 (150)	55 (60)	10 (25)
Albania	50 (10)	135 (105)	60 (60)	-
	562 (578)	635 (635)	263 (268)	210 (225)

In brackets figures for the month of May (Service U.)

To the left of the GS/RA official data.

Compared to the real situation inferred from the records of the GS/RA, the table of the strength and departmental subdivision appeared the following:

	March	May
Bombers	591 (555)	608 (578)
Fighters	675 (580)	841 (635)
Recon. Land	257 (283)	296 (268)
Recon. Mar.	217 (210)	220 (225)
	1740 (1628)	1965 (1706)

Incidentally the data collected by the RAF.

An analysis of data collected by the Service U. was evident the remarkable numerical approximation than the actual texture of force described by GS/RA.[55]

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Tactical reconnaissance of WDAF signaled for the first time on 1 February, the presence of German units in Sirtica, photographing west of El Agheila a 8 wheeled armored cars of the DAK.

HQ / RAF Middle East and implements appropriately processes information obtained as a reinforcement the 257th heavy bombardment Wing with twin-engine "Wellington" for attacks on Libyan ports, while came from the USA 5,800 vehicles in the months of February and March and more substantial reinforcements of men and war materials were traveling from England and America to the Middle East commands to strengthen the WDF.

On 7 March the 132nd "Ariete" Arm. Div. (Gen. Ettore Baldassarre) now completed was placed as was agreed to the employment by the DAK and moved into the area of En Nofilia as units of the 2nd echelon of the 5th Light Div. to Ara dei Fileni, while two Italian-German recon units were in an advanced position in the area of Mugtaa. On March 10, it was activated an Italian Liaison Office at the DAK commanded by General Calvi di Bergolo, which was to act as an intermediary between the ASI and the German High Command of the Corps of Africa.

Gen. Rommel had agreed with the Gen. Gariboldi the conduct to be followed in the development of operations, but as you will have occasion to observe later in the interesting military events in North Africa, the German General consistently adopted a unilateral method of action, personalistic , influenced by the presumption of his ability and supported by the operating ability of the DAK, a method that accurately restating, albeit to a lesser extent, the personal conduct of the Fuhrer with the initiative aimed at obtaining conclusive results by creating a *fait accompli* and putting in thus, unexpectedly, friends and enemies in the face of reality. Rommel immediately applied this method ignoring advice to be prudent, avoiding rigid and traditional systems, adopting revolutionary schemes, operational concepts that left stunned the Italians commands and forced them willy-nilly, to adapt its methods or isolate themselves with the danger to exclude them from any successes or undeservedly bear the failures that this bold but questionable behavior automatically produced.

From this personalistic vision and (the implementing method, was born in the spring of 1941 the myth of Rommel, the legend was created in part contrived the "Desert Fox", it began with the first failures also the objective evaluation process after the event that was to bring a final determination of the facts to scale over the years, the dynamic personality of the German general, considered and judged in the light of a sharp and objective analysis, how lucky and excellent tactician but mediocre strategist with limited viewing professionally as a lower rating for global capacity of a von Rundstedt or von Bock, an Eisenhower and a Montgomery, of a Zhukov and a Koniev, a MacArthur and a Yamashita - himself a victim of his myth and his presumption that had fatally take him, in 1944, to the *redde rationem** of his meteoric career ended tragically in suicide - last alternative left to him the prospect of a firing squad for treason envisaged by his Fuhrer and Reich that would destroy a myth.

On March 11 the Supreme Command orientated General Gariboldi to an offensive study as a prelude to the reconquest of Cyrenaica, study that met the approval of the OKW and Rommel himself who judged to be considered ready for an offensive within the first ten days of May, that is, as soon as the DAK could have also the 15th Panzer Div. in the transfer phase to Italy. In this case the S. C. ordered the transfer to Libya of the “Trento" mot. Div. and the assignment with the "Ariete" with M.13/41 tanks to replace the outdated L. 35.

A series of channeling provisions in a gradual strengthening program, enter in a regular strategic Italian-German offensive vision at SC/OKW level, the completion of which formed the basis for the beginning of the attack the British 8th Army in Cyrenaica, explicated as a preliminary and limited attack in time waiting to strike an broader offensive commitment scheduled for the beginning of autumn and directed this time against Egypt.

In this case the S.C. gave the appropriate provisions for the eventual transfer to N.A. beyond that of the "Trento" mot. Div. also of the semi-motorized "Torino" Div., the vehicles allocations for the other units on site, with the necessary supplies to start and continue the offensive of autumn.[56]

*Latin = to give an account

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Rommel's thinking, however, diverged somewhat from the concepts and directives of the S. C. /OKW as it was oriented towards a general offensive action in the spring, counting only on the forces available at the time in Libya, with which it was possible, according to the German general: "... beat the 8th Army in Cyrenaica and penetrate deep into Egypt." It was necessary to downsize with some meetings and appropriate that offensive intention recommendations, certainly bold but extremely dangerous, but Rommel, in the stubborn vision of his intuition, the unfailing ability of his quality and the confidence and ability of his DAK, wanted to prove with facts to be right, even after a moderator interview had on March 19 at the HQ of the Fuhrer, where Field Marshal von Brauchitsch told him to wait for the arrival of the 15th Panzer (due in May) before undertaking offensive actions.

Rommel did not keep proper account of the authoritative advice of his immediate superior, since he disregarded it and ignored moderation and prudence.

In addition to the Italian units assigned to the DAK, he requested and obtained by the Fl. Afrika was. 1 Group Stukas, 3 Groups fighter, 2 Groups bomber, 3 logistics Transport Groups, and from the Supercomando ASI support the Italian 5th Air Fleet and, leaving Tripoli, is leading to advanced tactical command of DAK to Sirte, where he had moved since March 13, this particular which contrasted with the rearmost accommodation that the Italian command normally took at the front.

On the same day a offensive push of German-Italian armored elements led to the occupation of Marada and the 24th (three days after the fall of the brave Giarabub garrison) was occupied el Agheila after a brief conflict in focus with the modest English garrison.

The occupation of the two locations, and particularly El Agheila, created tactical favorable premises that fell detailed, in using the Axis defensive plan that suddenly, on the morning of March 31, Gen. Rommel gave the order to advance, surprising with this sudden decision of the Italian Libya command, the SC, the OKW and the English commands.

A few hours later, after the positive development of events, Rommel with surprise sent a telegram to the Superior Command ASI confirming the advance of DAK that: "... pursuing the enemy in the direction of Ajdabiya".

For three days there were carried out air strikes on the enemy positions and only in the day of the 31st the aviation Axis attacked with tactical missions mechanized means and gun emplacements, to show that even in the field of aircraft everything was done in the name of improvisation and safety given the surprise attack ordered by Rommel on short notice for air units.

On the same day the WDAF reacted by attacking with the Blenheim of the 55th Sqdn. the Misurata airport escorted by Hurricane of the 3rd RAAF, repeating the night attack with Wellington acting on supply columns marching into Sirtica.

The Italian-German offensive forced the RAF Command in the Middle East to transfer to Cyrenaica the 45th bomber Sqdn. and 73rd fighter who had been pulled back and that together with the 3rd Australian was assigned to the defense of Tobruk, directly threatened by the unforeseen advanced Axis.

Occupied Ajdabiya and Zuetina, on April 4 the Italian-German troops entered Benghazi with Gen. O'Connor repeating in reverse the route through the Gebel.

Rommel after a violent argument sustained the previous day with Gen. Gariboldi who was trying to restrain him and lead him to caution, was in turn incited to continue the advance of the OKW and then rebound even from SC: an eloquent example of the typical dysfunctions and diversity of interpretations that reigned in the high command of the Axis and between DAK and the high command ASI.

On the day of the 5th the WDAF had attacked Sceleidima and Msus with Blenheim while the tactical cooperation aviation withdrew on Derna losing 2 Hurricane in combat and Axis aviation supported the advanced effectively with bombing and strafing while suffering the loss in two days of 9 Ju. 87.

Night raids on Tripoli and strafing of Hurricane of column Axis marching towards Cyrenaica completed the picture of the day. The QG/RAF sent urgently to Maaten Baggush Commodore Collishaw for reorganizing units of WDAF in sight to resist in place in the area of Tobruk and reject the Axis advanced, while the 204th Group was reconstituted as the following squadrons were assigned:

Fighters 73rd of Hurricane –Tobruk
274th of Hurricane –Gerawla
6th of Lysander -Hurricane –Tobruk[57]

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Bombers 14th of Blenheim -Burg el Arab
45th Blenheim –Fuka
55th Blenheim –Zimla
39th Glenn Martin -Maaten Baggush
24th SAAF Glenn Martin -Fuka
257th Wellington -Fuka (from Shalluago and Kabrit)

They were also brought to full staffing the 3rd RAAF and 38th and 216th Sqdns of Wellington. The defense of Tobruk with 6th and 73rd Squadrons was given to V. Air Marshall Tedder delegated by Marshal Longmore then in inspection in Sudan.

The 7th while flying over with his "Stork" moving Afrika Korps units in the area of Tmimi, Rommel was surprised by a retreating enemy column and subjected to strong anti-aircraft fire hitting the Fi. 156 forcing the pilot to a lucky emergency landing resolved without any consequence whatsoever.

Undoubtedly, and regardless of the criticism received, largely deserved, Rommel proved a brave general, modern conceptions, who personally followed on the battlefield the evolution of events and personally decided what to do.

The 8th was conquered Cyrene and the next day Derna after a violent clash of armored vehicles in the El Mechili area.

The 10th was occupied Ain el Gazala, surrounding Tobruk and continued the advance towards Bardia and Sollum that were reached respectively 12 and 13 April.

In only two weeks the whole Cyrenaica and Marmarica were recaptured and Rommel proud of its successes could prove, and with reason, the goodness of his concepts and his qualities as a bold commander, lucky and daring: these characteristics certainly not covered in severe professional orthodoxy of the Italian school of Staff!

The strategic privileged positions the British had painstakingly built in Libya, suddenly collapsed even before the new situation that had arisen in the meantime, with the German attack on Greece and Yugoslavia, with the revolt flared up in Iraq and anti-British unrest in Syria, with the military defeat in Cyrenaica!

The DAK soldiers captured in one shot Generals: Neame (military Governor of Cyrenaica), O'Connor (the victor of Bede Fomm), Remington (expert in armored troops), Gambier-Perry (commander of the 2nd Arm. Div.), Col. Combe (commander of the famous 11th. "Hussars" Regiment): a cast of first-rate brains that resulted in a serious loss for the Empire Staff HQ of the Middle East!

The British casualties included more than 2,000 prisoners including six generals, 120 guns, 80 tanks, 500 vehicles, large quantities of military equipment and supplies.

The front line was quickly moved to the east over 1000 km!

The reconquest of Cyrenaica was leading to a forward shift of the aviation organization and the restoration of the airfields of Ara Fileni, el Agheila, Ajdabiya, Benghazi, Derna, promptly joined by technical inspection teams that provided to the operational viability primarily for transport multiengine carrying essential supplies for advanced troops who closely followed the DAK.

The 5th Air Fleet, however, could not reach in a short time a satisfactory level for the modest offensive bomber component that it possessed, reduced to ten BR. 20 and as many Ju. 87, since the two groups with SM. 79 available showed a very low index of efficiency and were only modest operational aid to the point that the 50th left its remaining three-engined aircraft to the 53rd and was repatriated, replaced by 27th (Sqd. 18th/52nd) under the command of Lt. Col. Pietro Morino that with 15 SM 79 moved from Alghero to Castel Benito.

To thwart the many enemy raids on Tripoli was organized an elementary alarm system based on short radio signals transmitted by the X Army Corps - Sirte (2.2), Buerat (1.1), in addition Sirte (3.3.), German units (4.4). The slowness of communications and the short distance between the sighting points and airports concerned, however, made compartment each fighter interception action, objectively considering that the British bombers flew over 3500/4000 m and with speeds greater then a CR. 42, among other things, devoid of R.T. apparatus and therefore unable to receive timely reports.

The system was abandoned shortly after to manifest non-compliance.

The 83rd Sqd. C.T. of the 18th Group (Capt. E. Molinari) was stationed in the south at Hon for surveillance of any de Gaulleist infiltration and adequately strengthen the APC.[58]

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On 22 March, two BR. 20 of 98th Gr. Aut. BT in the night takeoff from Bir Dufan collided and exploded, killing eight crew members. A great loss for Col. De Wittembeschi's units.

Since March 24, the Lt. Col. Vosilla recently promoted to the next grade, received the order from Air Fleet Command starting escorting missions of the Ju. 87 Picchiatori and instructed the Capt. Giuntella (85th Sqd.) to run some tests with Ju. 87 of the 96th B.a.T. Group

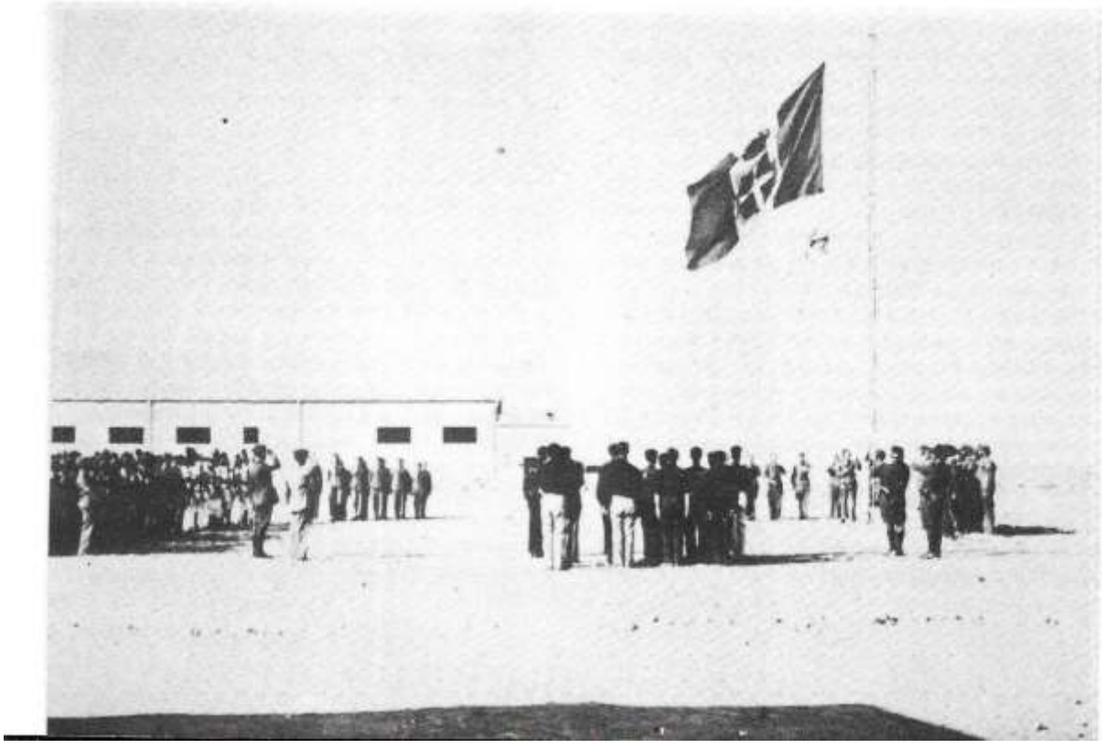
Some buried technical difficulties (increase propeller speed) were eliminated with a more accurate monitoring and review of the reverse gear.

On April 4, the 18th Group C.T. received the order to move on the airport K. 2 in Benghazi where he settled in full on the 7th. The next day the Capt. Giuntella received orders to move with 6 CR. 42 of 85th to Derna/El Fteiah -which were employed by German forces, and that the command of the DAK requested and obtained the necessary air cover. With 6 Fiat also started a four-engine SM. 74 of the 604th Sqd. T with a group of specialists and materials to respect and safety to ensure a minimum of autonomy and functionality of CR.42.

Arrived in the late afternoon in Derna, whose landing ground appeared even sprinkled with scrap, destroyed armored vehicles, recent graves of the fallen, abandoned vehicles and materials, the pilots of the 85th Sqd. learned from the German tank drivers that the field had been taken, lost and regained the same day, and that some sections were still mined. In the evening the G. 50 and Ju. 87 arrived also.

The next morning, Capt. Giuntella met on the airfield when Gen. Rommel was pressing to have fighter escort for DAK, which is informed of the possibility of intervention by the Italian aircraft that, by failing to follow supplies, were deprived of petrol and lubricating oil. Rommel issued immediate orders on the subject and on the same day German vehicles carried to El Fteiah fuel and oil to supply CR. 42, G. 50 of the 155th Group CT and Stukas. The SM. 74 took off again to Benghazi with a cargo of twenty British wounded.[59]

Flag Raising on recaptured El Fteiah Airport (Derna). Use meaningful ceremony that bore witness to the rescue of Italian Weapons sorely tried by the 1940/41 winter defeats.



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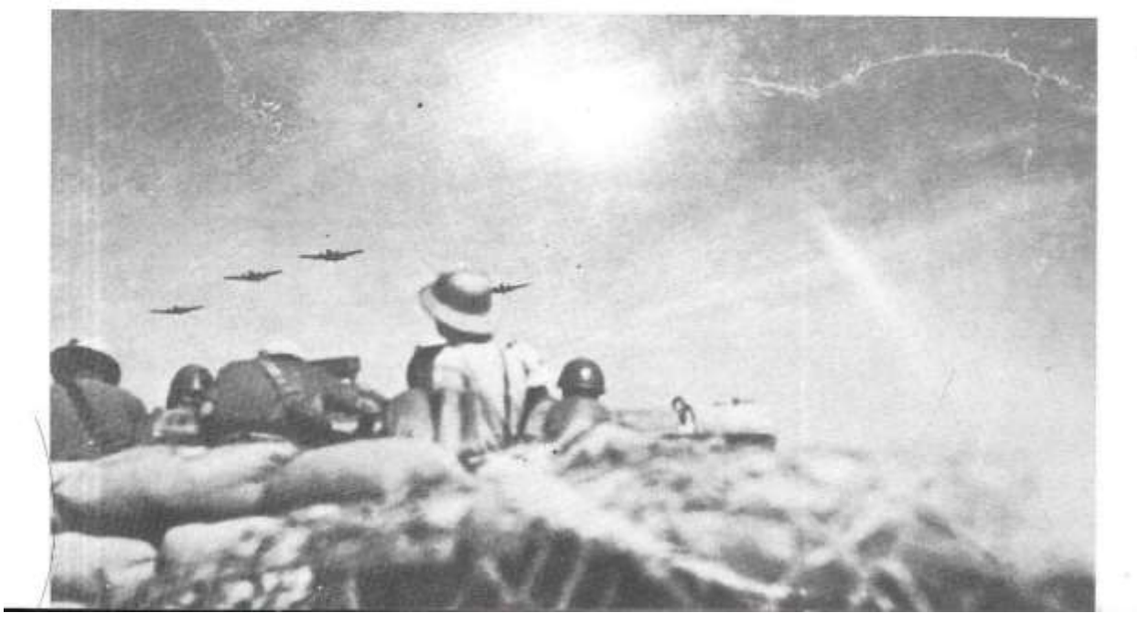
Graves of German soldiers in the Libyan desert. The intervention of the DAK in N.A was instrumental in rebalance the military situation is seriously compromised by the serious defeats suffered by the Italian armed forces.

The Italian advanced positions overflown by the bombers of R.A. directed against the enemy positions of Cyrenaica that was about to be evicted from the English units on the run.



Tauorga - Il Cap. Giuntella comandante l'85ª Sqd. del 18° Gruppo C.T. assieme al Ten. Speker della 83ª - la 95ª Sqd. era al comando del Cap. Lodi. Il reparto fu fra i primi a giungere a Derna rioccupata dall'Asse.

Una mitragliera Flak einling mod. 38 da posizione cal. 20/70 a guardia di un campo d'aviazione avanzato del Fl. Fu. Afrika nella Sirtica. L'unità aerea al comando del Gen. Froelich forniva il supporto tattico al DAK.

Also arrived Bf. 110, Ju. 87 and three-engined Ju. 52 for the logistic operational support of the DAK.

Strafing Hurricanes and some damage to the following material on the night of the 11th by a bombing that did not cause deaths or damage was the response of WDAF. The Truck fleet of the Vosilla group is fattened by numerous brand new British vehicles (the kilometers on the speedometer marked the separation between Alexandria and Derna – author's note), which were of great use to the 18th Group C.T. In the two weeks of fighting they had occurred numerous air battles with losses on both sides: the Fl. Fu. Afrika was had lost 4 Bf. 110, 14 Ju.87, 2 Ju.52, 17 Ju.88 while the 155th Group CT had 3 G. 50 destroyed on the field of El Derna/Fteiah by Hurricane surprise attack. The WDAF had meanwhile lost 4 Blenheim, 6 Hurricane, 1 Lysander.

The first British prisoners captured by DAK work to carry bombs of Italian airplane under the supervision of a German soldier. The offensive of Rommel surprised the British and Italian commands for the speed and proven results.

The forward movement of the Italian air units continued slowly for a number of technical and logistical difficulties, and consequently the aero-tactical support to the armored troops could not be explicated with the readiness and solicitude required by the DAK given the lack of other things assault aircraft or fighter-bombers, except for the dozen dive bombers of the 96th Group BaT. engaged exclusively in the attacks on Tobruk.[60]

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Per la prima volta fanno la loro comparsa sui cieli della Libia gli Stukas-Specialisti armieri del 96° Gruppo BaT (Magg. E. Ercolani) provvedono a rifornire di nastri le armi alari MG. 17.

Onto Benghazi airfields moved also the 2nd Group CT gradually (later to Derna), the 98th Group B.T. and finally the 175th Sqd. RST. then began nighttime offensive missions and daytime gradually more frequent and effective, including damage to the military ships “Chakla", “Vendetta" and merchant ships “Bankura", "Draco", "Urania", hit in collaboration with German planes.

Ju. 87 of the 96th BaT Group. flying to Tobruk in a charming African picture - Battuta in Sirtica and Cyrenaica, the British 8th Army shut itself up in the fortress of Tobruk resisting for the Axis months.

In the besieged Tobruk where barricaded the Australian 9th Inf. Div. defended by the 4th A/A Brigade and by the Hurricanes of the 6th Sqdn., rejecting the British over the Egyptian border, positively restored the military situation, the Axis could look in the spring of 1941 with certain tranquility to the future of the war in the desert thanks to presence of the powerful DAK.

At the end of April arrived on the battlefield the 15th Panzer Div. (Maj. Gen. Prittwitz), the most powerful of all the units of DAK, with his Mark III-IV tanks, motorized and armored units, artillery and Flak with deadly cannons 88/56 also used antitank function. The presence of the dreaded Stukas had no effect in preventing the offensive activities of the Mediterranean Fleet bombarding recklessly Axis coastal positions with the cruisers “Orion”, “Ajax”, "Gloucester", "Perth" backed by destroyers and gunboats.[61]

The signs of the English defeat - In the desert lies abandoned and damaged a twin-engine Bristol Blenheim object of curiosity of Italian soldiers looking for a "souvenir of war".

A BR.20 of the 98th BT Group (Lt. Col. I. De Wittembeschi). For the first time the conflict started the twin-engine Fiat made its appearance in the N.A. skies.

An Air Force truck parked on a runway of Marmarica directed towards the new Axis deployment. It was beginning to advance eastward in a climate of renewed confidence and enthusiasm.

Derna / El Fteiah - In the dusty field margins are offset from the Ju.87 the 96th BaT Group., A four-engine SM.74 provides the technical / logistical needs of the unit transporting men and materials.

Ufficiali italiani e tedeschi osservano una pattuglia di Ju. 87 in volo verso Tobruk. La piazzaforte nemica sottoposta all'assedio subì gravi perdite in navi e personale ad opera dell'aviazione dell'Asse.

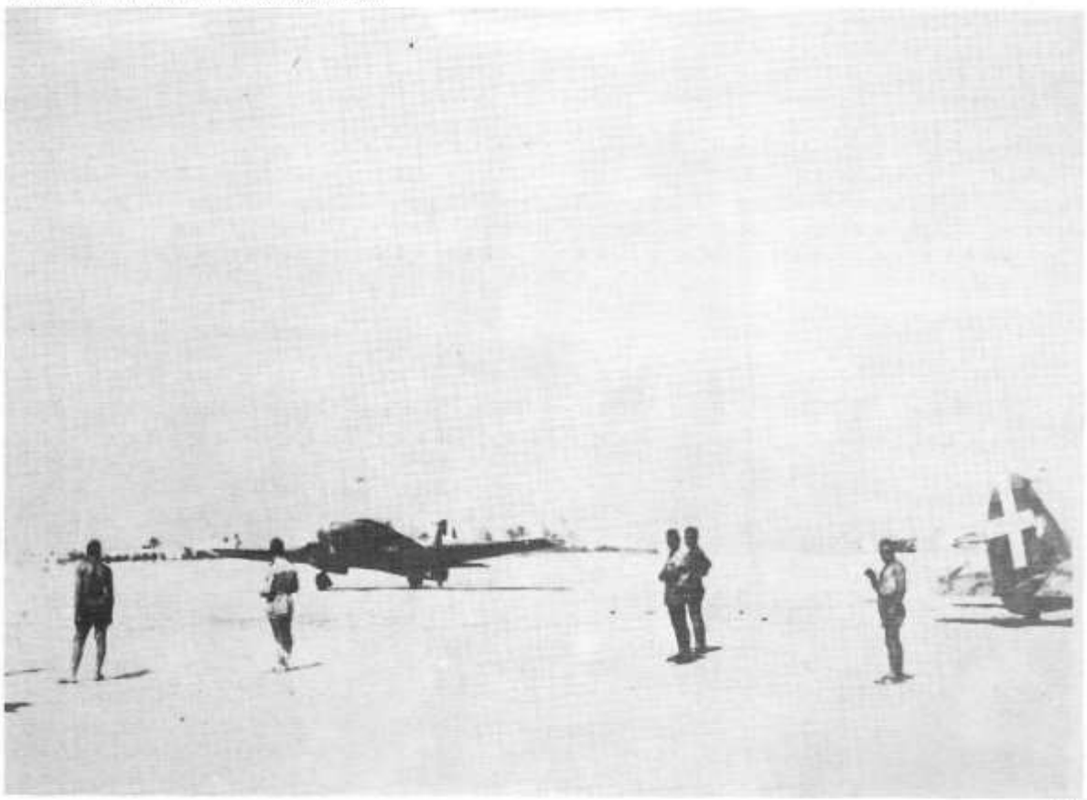
Are particularly bombed the areas of Bardia, Sollum, Ras el Tin, Bomba, Bu Amud, Ain el Gazala.

Among the special units available to the Middle East H.Q. operations were the Commandos, was joined in March by the L.R.D.G. Brigade S.A.S. (Special Air Service) RAF to command of Lt. Col. Laycock, made up of highly skilled saboteurs paratroopers in destruction and coups, while among the tasks that were assumed by the RAF in collaboration with the allies of England, there was one to reorganize, train and equip with British material the Greek Air Force.

The victorious outcome of the Italian-German offensive that was ruled out with a positive result the concerns and fears of the Italians commands and the same OKW, did "forgive" an deserved amnesty the Rommel initiatives, but his arbitrary work and overly independent was censored and analyzed by the inspector sent from the OKW to Africa - Army Gen. von Paulus - who saw fit to make clarifications in this regard and admonish him for the future to fulfill the orders of his Italian and German superiors, having rightly assessed the OKW, the opportunity not to create resentment and differences of opinion with the Italian Supreme Command.

But Rommel, is now convinced of the goodness of his systems, not held in excessive account invitations and the advice that came from above.[62]

Libyan Sahara - A Ca.309 "Ghibili" of Saharan aviation taxiing in the oasis of Gialo. The APC played a valuable and obscure work by controlling the immense desert territory of Libya.



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The Col. CSA Giuseppe Del Vasto Chief of the Health Service of the 5th Air Fleet of Libya. Rescue Aircraft SM 81 Ca.133 and Ca 309 produced outstanding performance quickly rescuing hundreds of wounded and sick.

A Blenheim just shot down by Italian fighters stopped burning on the edge of an airport which it had tried to attack.

A Patrol CR.42 of the 18th Group C.T. on the Hon airfield with the support of a logistics Ca.133. The unit back from the operating cycle of the C.A.I. was sent urgently to N.A. (Archives Borgiotti / Gori).

The siege of Tobruk

Remained isolated and encircled by the swift advance of the Axis, the stronghold of Tobruk was designated by Imperial G.S. to be regarded not as a defensive stronghold to keep to the extreme physical and moral possibilities of the garrison, but is fulfilling the functions of an advanced strategic fortress like Malta and Gibraltar, located in the heart of the enemy device, which was always possible to implement initiatives and offensive also of great importance to take actions against the Axis.

These precise intentions come direct from London through the War Office and Imperial G.S., the maintenance and defense of the fortress were entrusted jointly by Churchill to the Army, the Navy and the British Air Force located in the Middle East, responsibilities also jointly involved in serious task assigned to them.

The garrison consisted of the entire 9th Australian Inf. Div. reinforced by a Inf. and a Armored brigade, 4 Regiments field artillery, the 2nd A/T Regiment, a AA Brigade with 16 94 mm guns and 60 Bofors 40 mm. machine guns, they had to add a dozen batteries of Italian war booty. Altogether about 25,000 men of each arm, Corps and services. The siege of the fortress was held by units of the "Brescia" and by the “Ariete”, the 5th Light Div. and artillery, engineering, services for just over 8,000 Axis soldiers.

A first attack on April 14 was rejected by the strong anti-tank guns and artillery fire and also it was necessary to send units of the "Trento" to retry in force a new attack that would be this time preceded and supported by aviation forces in the extent and intensity more than the previous attempt.

On April 14 enemy fighters were attacking a Cant. 1007 Bis of the 175th Sqd. RST during a mission on Alexandria and struck to death LT. RA Oss. Ugo Del Curto who bravely had manned a machine gun to defend the three-engine that had wounded on board.

To the memory of the gallant Officer he was awarded the M.O.v.m.

On April 14 plane-fighting in the sky of Tobruk with Hurricane and CR. 42/G. 50 escorting Ju 87 - 5 planes downed.

Another failed attack on the 15th also thwarted by aviation that machine-gunned enemy positions of the "Trento" and also led the attack the next day will negatively ended with severe losses to the Italian troops, which Gen. Rommel attributed to inadequate training and insufficient armament such as contributory causes of failure.[63]

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It was necessary to implement a pause and analyze more thoroughly the situation for the fierce and unexpected resistance of the enemy, which also showed activity and initiative in multifaceted way.

April 16 -The 18th Group CT. sent S.M. Gorrini in protective cruise on the field of Derna where he attacked a "Blenheim" exploding in the air - 2 survivors parachuted.

April 17 -The Lt. Bordoni shoots down twin -engined Bristol flying on Derna.

April 19 -The Flak mistakenly shoots against a training Ju. 88 escorted by a Italian fighter.

A CR. 42 was hit by A/A fire but managed to land without further damage.

April 20 -A “Blenheim” shot down by the A/A fire fell upon the airfield of Derna damaging a dispersed Bf. 110.

April 21 - night bombing on the airfield of El Fteiah by the RAF in the destruction of numerous Italian and German planes.

In the night on April 20 there was a landing behind the Italian positions by a strong group of the SAS Commandos that was blocked and neutralized with the capture of sixty men; April 22 was instead the Tobruk garrison to launch an attack with the support of armored vehicles that smashed a section of the front held by "Ariete” causing serious losses.

The next morning "A counterattack by German tanks re-established the situation even with the intervention of the air force; the same evening another attack in the area of the "Brescia" supported by WDAF.[64]

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Specialisti del 67° Gruppo - 115° Sqd. O.A. (Cap. G. Minervino) sottopongono alle loro attenzioni un vecchio biplano IMAM-Ro. 37 Bis ancora utilizzato in AS in molteplici e utili ruoli di servizio.

Minor attacks were manifested on 25 and 26 April.

Tobruk is demonstrated every day more dangerous war front that could be reckoned as incorrectly originally planned. Among the captured enemy material in Cyrenaica it included the confidential report n. S 46251/Ops HQ/RAF-Middle East direct command 202nd Group and 252nd Wing (Sqdns. F. 3rd -33rd -80th -112th) as follows: "The best method of attack to three-engined SM. 79 is based on a source from behind slightly below the tail, where it is a sheltered corner of the shot." The Air Fleet Command emanated appropriate steps in this regard.

As already mentioned, with the text of the ground operations, the 5th Air Fleet had been unable to provide optimum and comprehensive support as expected and hoped, for a number of objective difficulties which still struggled; difficulties due primarily to the incomplete and limited technical and logistical organization which had been affected to a greater extent operational aspect, the serious military events preceding the problem with the loss of equipment and materials, deficiency of technical equipment, replenishment of depots, lack of sufficient vehicles, inadequate stock of compared materials, were just some of the causes that had led to the crisis of service that only with great participation and dedication of all the staff was trying to overcome.

The materials sent from Italy arrived slowly and what could be allocated to the R.A. suffered, like everyone else, the ordeal of the sea crossing, the wait in ports, the attacks of the enemy. Part of the precious cargo of the steamer "Ogaden" was lost, including long-awaited airport equipment and this loss caused a further delay in the transfer of other units destined for the A.S., blocked by the GS/RA despite repeated requests from the 5th Air Fleet Command, eager to re-establish a perceived level of balance with the more powerful and equipped Luftwaffe.[65]

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A FI.Fu Afrika specialist check cartridges for MG. 17 installed on a Bf 109 / E of JG.27 -The presence of German fighter rebalancing in N.A. the participation of Hurricane and P 40 of the WDAF

Tankers of the DAK marching in the Marmarico desert aboard a PZ III - The Deutsche Afrika Korp, according to tactical thinking Rommel proving admirably an efficient instrument of war.

Pause for rations of the pilots of the 18th Gruppo CT .; Right Capt. Gino Lodi commanding the 95th Sqd. In the spring of 1941 came in the first MC 200 to N.A. to reinforce the G 50 and CR. 42.

April 9 Superaereo in response to a solicitation of Gen. Ajmone Cat, responded with dispatch n. 1B/6569: "It is not possible to increase Libyan air forces until the moment they are available airport facilities currently shipping for A.S. It requires that the units can operate on suitably equipped bases that ensure efficiency and use to avoid past negative experience lived in N.A.“.

On April 14, the 96th Group participated with 7 Ju. 87 to an important mission on Tobruk in collaboration with 36 German Stukas escorted to higher altitude, from 5 Bf. 110 and below by G. 50 and CR. 42 Groups of 155th and 18th; a total of 74 aircraft attacked the prepared defenses with bombs from 50 to 250 kg, the concentrations of armored and mechanized vehicles and batteries defense countered by strong anti-aircraft fire and a dozen of the Hurricane's the 73rd Sqdn. They were lost in the fighting 2 G. 50 with the death of Lt. Cugnasca and M.llo Marinelli, 3 Ju. 87 of the I/St.G.1, a link Hs 126 and 1 Bf. 110 against loss of 3 Hurricane.

In afternoon new Ju. 87 mission escorted by G. 50 and CR. 42 and new clash with the 73rd Hurricane's with losses on both sides.

The next day, the 96th was withdrawn from the line and sent back to Tripoli for reconstitution; It was replaced by the 18th Group that was necessarily transformed as a forward line unit with mounts for wing bombs applied to the CR. 42 wings.

To trim down the powerful Hurricane of WDAF arrived in Africa the first fighter Bf. 109/E of JG. 27, with speeds over 570 km/h, two 20 mm. cannons, 2 weapons of 7.9 mm, ceiling of 11,000 m. The "Emil" version of the Messerschmitt.

At the end of the month they entered in the line the MC. 200 of the 374th Sqd and also the component to be Italian fighter suffered a qualitative improvement over CR.42 and G.50 in which about a year the Italian air force was fighting with WDAF in unequal situation.

Something in Italian field was moving, even if the measures taken could not be the beginning of a desirable technological balance with English aviation for a long time warned, but not realized.

April 19, Rommel was running a new mortal danger when being in Bardia area with a small posse of security, was attacked by Hurricane who machine-gunned the command vehicles, killing a motorcyclist and the driver of a half-track and also affecting the machine on which was the same Rommel was fortunately unharmed, and wounding his driver who was replaced at the helm by the same Rommel.

The most positive aspect for the 5th Air Fleet was that as mentioned, to receive in April the first fighter squadron equipped with MC.200 (374th Sqd. 153rd Group CT under the command of Maj. Pilot Andrea Favini), event because it is modestly represented a significant hearing and requested renewal of the fly line to adapt the RA qualitative comparison with the most powerful enemy aviation. During the attacks on Tobruk they were distinguished again and particularly the Picchiatori of 96th Group B.a.T. (Sqd. 236th/237th) that effectively struck important targets together with the German Stukas.

The escort was normally supplied by the G.50s of the 155th Group CT that performed the dive in unison toward goals not to abandon Ju.87 in the dangerous phase of the pull-up at the end of dive, this critical moment of the mission of attack; This method of effective attack dangerous but, was repeatedly praised by the Germans for the dedication shown by Italian pilots.

Some aircraft were lost due to enemy attacks, forcing the significantly reduced 96th Group to assume its position on 19 April, handing over the few remaining efficient Ju.87s of the disbanded 237th to the surviving 236th Sqd. (Capt. Santinoni).[66]

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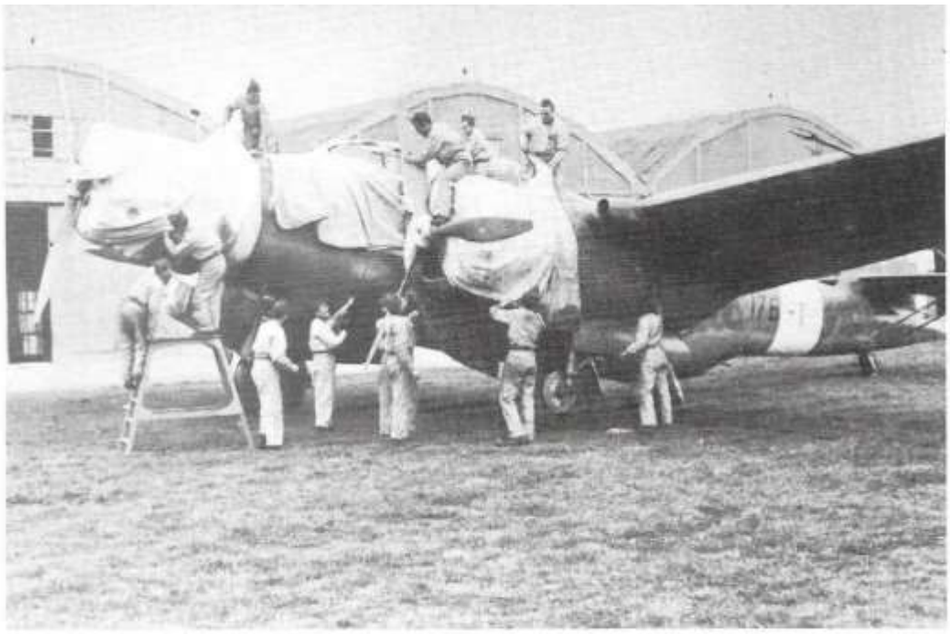

A Cant Z1007 Bis. of the 176th Sqd. RST stationed in N.A. These tri-engines rendered valuable srvice by providing the Higher Connamds daily news and iformaion about the enemy positions.

The unit's decline was due, in addition to the shortage of Stukas, also to the lack of Jumo 211 engines to replace those worn out by use in sandy areas and sent to Libya without AS filters.

From May 19, the 236th was sent to Tripoli to regroup and was placed under the command of Capt. Cerutti that employed in maritime reconnaissance and Anti-sub missions.

To participate actively in the siege of Tobruk employing less time and more occasions, they were equipped two airports in the Derna area and subsequently assigned the Martuba and Ain el Gazala airfields after finding by the WDAF of a large presence in the aforesaid airfields of Italian and German aircraft made the object of several attacks with bombers. It was equipped as an alternative spring board airfield also the land of Gambut.

In late April the Axis aviation deployment in Libya resulted the following:[67]

Pilots and specialists of the 209th Sqd Dive bombers in the desert stop in for a short break The Stukas on the ground in N.A. perfect and congenial range of uses of specialties

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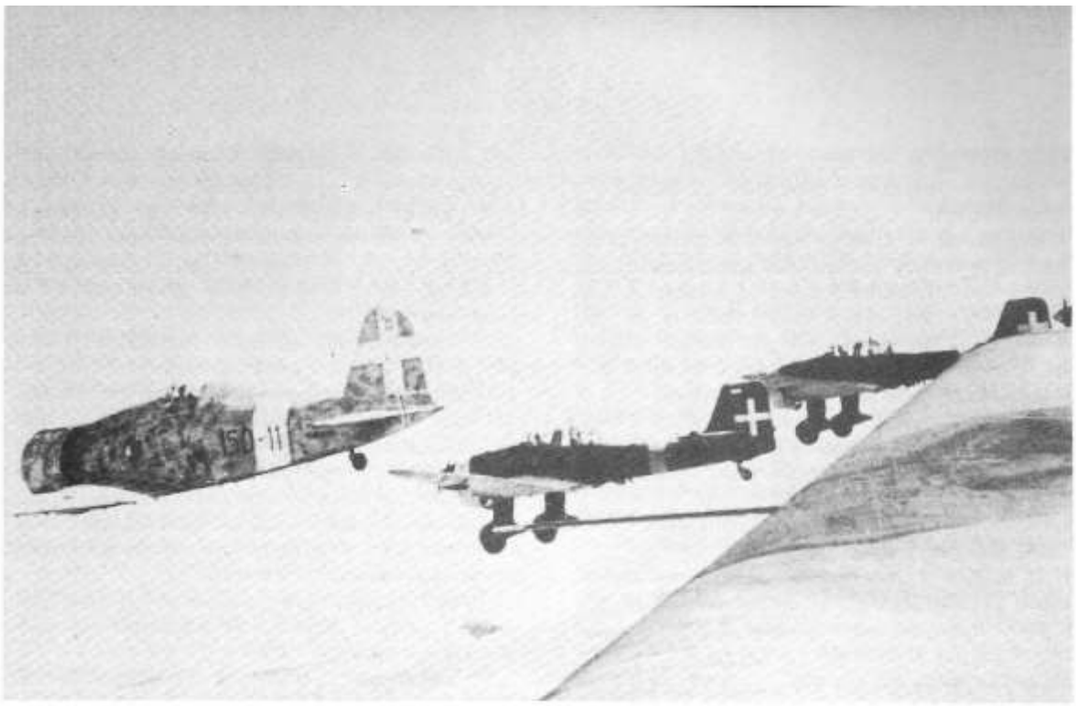

Ju87 the 239th Sqd BaT in flight to Tobruk escorted by G50 in the 2nd Group CT - After the harsh winter ordeal of 1940/41 the 5th Air Fleet reconstituted and strengthened proved a valuable instrument of war.

5th Air Fleet
175th Sqd. RST 1 Sec. Benghazi/Berka (1 Sec. in Castel Benito)
53rd Gr. BT Misurata
98th Gr. BT Berka
236th Sqd. Aut. B.a.T.Derna
27th Gr. BT Derna
2nd Gr. CT Derna
18th Gr. CT Derna
151st Gr. CT Berka
155th Gr. CT Derna (1 Sqd. Hon)
374th Sqd. CT Castel Benito
115th Sqd. DA Ain el Gazala
l29th Sqd. DA Castel Benito
145th Sqd. RM Caramanli / Tripoli

Flieger Fuhrer Afrika
I/St. G.1 Derna
II/St. G.2 Derna
III/ZG.26 Derna (1 Sqd.)
I/JG.27 Ain el Gazala (1 Sqd.)
III/LG.l Derna (1 Sqd.)

Altogether they had 235 efficient Italian- German aircraft in the 1st line as follows:

Bombers		Fighters	
SM.79	n. 18	CR.42	n. 37
BR.20	n. 8	G.50	n. 35
Ju.87	n. 6	MC.200	n. 7
German		Scouts	
Ju.87	n. 40	Ro.37	n. 7
Bf.l10	n. 12	Ca.311	n. 4
Ju.88	n.8	Ghibli	n. 28
Bf.l09	n. 17	Cant.501	n. 6[68]

Rommel and his entourage observed the phases of an air combat between Italian and British fighters. You notice on the car of Horch the Friendship Banner of the commander of DAK

Chronology of War (May)

May 3 - RAF Incursion on Benina - 4 Ju.52 destroyed.

May 4 -The 18th Group receives charge the first 4 CR.42 equipped with wing bomb launchers, fuel tanks, Nardi fragmentation bomb and dorsal armor (MM. 7479 + 7482) that the commander of the 13th Air Force Div. Gen. Matricardi, assigns to the attacks on Tobruk. The escort will be provided by other CR.42 and G.50 in command of Lt. Col. Baylon.

On 10 May, S.M. Squassoni in alarm cruise attacked a Bristol “Blenheim” directed on Derna chasing strafing into the Gulf of Bomba and firing 1,450 shots from 12.7 and 7.7 (the CR.42 ex CAI had mixed armament -note) without, however, see him fall.

May 12, Gen. Rommel sends its congratulations to the Italian pilots accompanying the Ju.87 until a few meters above the ground when bombing against Tobruk targets.

The division of operational tasks between the Italian and German air forces established: strategic reconnaissance areas of Alexandria and the Suez Canal to the Luftwaffe; Ground strategic reconnaissance to beyond Fuka to the R.A.; Italian escort fighters to the Italian-German bombers, German fighters for the bombers and fighter interceptions attacks the Axis troops. Defense of Tripoli and Benghazi to the Italian fighters for port, maritime convoys, airports security.

Close reconnaissance and Libyan Sahara entrusted to the O.A. and maritime surveillance to Cant.501 of Marinavia for the protection of the routes of the convoys to and from Libya, together with a Sqd. of Bf.110.

In May, it had been finally overcome some difficulties and infrastructural improvement of the situation on the ground service involved the launch of the planned transfers of units: in time they reached Libya with the 28th Group BT (Sqd. 10th/19th) Maj. Michele Banchio, the 239th Sqd. B.A.T. (Capt. Giuseppe Cenni), the 20th Group CT (Sqd. 151st/352nd/353rd) under the command of Lt. Col. Mario Bonzano, the 376th Sqd. C.B. [F.B.] with Fiat CR.42 with wing bombs (Capt. Ippolito Lalatta) first tactical support unit where one could feel the urgent need after the dissolution of Stormo assault Sqd. and finally the 174th Sqd. RTD (Capt. Ferruccio Buzz) and 279th Sqd. AS (Capt. Orazio Bernardini).

A total of one hundred new planes on their way to reinforce the 5th Air Fleet, and they improved the plurality of use with the various specialties they represented.

With the arrival in Libya the 239th Sqd. Picchiatori, started immediately on the front of Tobruk, the 5th Air Fleet restored from the long swooping free component activity and resumed attacks on the besieged Tobruk.

On May 25, the first mission to land targets of Tobruk with 7 Ju.87 escorted by 10 G.50 2nd Group CT and close protection to 12 Stukas of I/St.G.1 accompanied by 10 G.50 directed against a British convoy sighted at sea for Tobruk. They were sunk the escort ship "Grimsby" and the tanker "Halka".

In the days following the escort ship "Sindonis" was sunk and damaged another vessel by German dive bombers.

In early July they were shot down the Ju.87 of Lieutenants Livio and Davario who left an aching void in the 239th Sqd.

The June with the onset of CR.42fb.a. of the 18th Group CT which operated together with the Italian-German Ju.87, there was an important mission on Tobruk fortifications with great precision affected but which cost the knocking down of M.llo Gallo of the 239th, whose Stuka was hit by violent anti-aircraft fire.

May 16 -The S.M. Petrignani was felling a Bristol “Blenheim” directed to Benghazi firing 1,400 rounds cal. 12.7 / 7.7 (85th Sqd./18th Aut Group. CT).

May 29 -The non-commissioned officers pilots Gorrini and Petrignani in protective cruise of the port of Benghazi each slashing "Blenheim" bomber. The two valiant aviators receive a congratulatory message from the Chief of Staff Gen. Pricolo.

May 31 -The 374th Sqd. CT (Cap. M. Veronesi) with MC.200 is assigned for use in the employ of the 18th Group CT short of CR.42 planes and waiting for new Fiat version AS aircraft.

They are carried out without any positive result of night interception flights. Lacking the radio and the spotlight to facilitate the experiments.

The influx of reinforcements allowed among other things to increase air support contingent deployed in Cyrenaica whereas the 5th Air Fleet for the operational tasks entrusted to it necessarily had to dilute its units from the fighting front to the rear, for the defense of logistics centers of Tripolitania and surveillance at sea for the protection of convoys, and finally to control the immense territory of the Sahara from which you can always expect surprises and attacks of the enemy.[69]

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More simplified the task instead of Fl.Fu. Afrika with his essentially offensive component and working closely with the DAK and of which Rommel served in essentially tactical field. The most important and delicate of the operating sector of N.A. was without doubt the technical problem and the flight equipment maintenance, which the GS/RA annexing extraordinary importance, because suddenly causing a troubling deterioration of efficiency in units decimated by wear of engines and mechanical parts due to sand, to the climate, existing environmental conditions in the airfields; before Libya and Egypt subsequently, the sectors that were absorbed in the ratio of 3 to 1 the greater number of consumed aviation engines and worn for operational needs. Precious in this technical aspect of the problem the work of Col. Donatello Gabrielli appointed by the Air Fleet Command.

June 16 -are installed on CR.42 the first R.T. stations and establish the first links in flight with the pilots satisfaction 18th Group CT which may finally receive information and operational orders.

June 22 -Telegram of Gen. Pricolo to commander 18th Aut Group. CT: "I am following with great satisfaction your magnificent work." "Add me in the lively welcomed deserved praise that rewards a tireless conduct of war command & operating offices - Gen. Matricardi".

June 24 - Praise Gen. Mario Ajmone Cat to the East Sector units to relentless war activities together with the Central sector units engaged in harsh monitoring and protection services.

June 27 - Test flight and release bombs in dive with CR.42 on the Benina test range. Aerial escort to a motorized division on the march from Benghazi to Barce. Cruising at an altitude of 3,000 m.

June 28 - Test release in dive with bombs on target from 50 kg to 20 m cross.

One of the section 374th MC.200 located at the airfield of Gath Bersis. The Advanced Tactical Command composed for the occasion by the Fleet Command after the suppression of airfield commands East/West, was represented by Air Div. "Pegaso" based in Derna, which served as via the operator for Cyrenaica where it collaborated with Fl.Fu. Afrika was set in the same location, even if different were the relations of engagement while roughly coordinated with the evolution of terrestrial military events. This was another disturbing symptom of the situation between the Axis commands while operating with mutual comradeship and common purpose, were affected to varying degrees the influence of their higher command, keeping in mind that the DAK disposed at will of the Fl. Fu. Africa and it was coordinating without limitation the appearance of tactical intervention while the 5th Air Fleet was acting employed by the Armed Forces High Command ASI and so sometimes dissimilar to the intentions of the DAK, with the result that often created dysfunctions, duplicate missions, service and operating interferences, disconnections and calling off not in sync with ground operations.

In time with advanced escort requests from Fl.Fu. Afrika for German bombers were almost always ready welcome from Italian, as he felt poor understanding by the Germans for Italian needs whenever you required the concurrence of Ju.87 for Italian troops tactical support. A strange situation that the Fleet Command saw fit to eliminate conveniently increasing the tactical component to meet the needs of the Italian command, but often disregarded Supercomando ASI with different interpretation.

Unfortunately this initiative of the Fleet Command was frustrated by reality, since the tactic dependence of Italian G.U. by Rommel was coordinated and supported in a broader operational plan that inevitably required the total Axis aviation cooperation; an ambiguous and contradictory situation that will drag absurdly throughout the course of the war in North Africa.

Was lost for indecision or absurd unfounded fears, a desirable clarification of the situation by Italian superiors commands until Stamage level, by rejecting the proposal to create a unified German-Italian aeronautical command to be given the full responsibility for R.A. to counter the ground's unified command given to Rommel, having refused the Germans the possibility of entrusting their air units to an Italian command, especially for Goering's decision, despite their presence in a territory subject to the Italian nationality, their quality of "host ally", the Italian numerical superiority, the rightness of opposing a Italian aerospace joint command authority objectively considering Command concessions made to Rommel. So everything remained as before.[70]

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At May 1941 the force situation of the Axis in North Africa was as follows:
Italian soldiers: 134,000 + 20,000 Libyans with 8,000 vehicles, 5,000 draft animals;
German soldiers: 30,000 with 7,000 vehicles.

A total of 184,000 soldiers for the maintenance and for that of civilian populations were needed supplies amounting to 140,000 tons monthly.

The expansion program of Libya prepared by GSG and agreed with the OKW, were planned: the influx of other 114,000 men (44,000 Germans), 14,500 vehicles, 4,500 motorcycles, 900 guns, 400,000 tons of annual materials and supplies more for food and to operate a mass of men not less than 300,000 units.

The enhancement program developed by the High Command, however, suffered from demagoguery or at least of excessive optimism, but not evaluated, then an Army which provided the Italian-German of 3 Army Corps (2 Italian) with 5 armored divisions (3 Italian), 7 Italian motorized divisions, 4 occupancy divisions type AS (North Africa) with a small staff.

For Armored Division was expected to change is for the existing of enhancing it (thus coming closer to the disputed thesis put forward in March by Rommel) and also for normal infantry division was expected with the sort order A.S. increased firepower and mobility.

Of this desirable but challenging program existed, however in 1941 in Italy, materials sufficient to equip only one armored division and two motorized units and proved problematic because unsolvable how it was possible to implement the program for N.A. and strengthen adequately units equipped with only mediocre Italian military weapons arsenal. Where to get the armor to equip the remaining units and the other 5 of motorized envisioned with its components in towed artillery, necessary vehicles, technical support units, logistics, antiaircraft and dependent services, whereas this program was also subject the possibilities of transport that was to unfold the Navy and the need to neutralize and greatly reduce the potential enemy threat to the convoys to Libya. In late April, there was still an Axis offensive effort to be right of the Tobruk garrison now under the command of Gen. Leslie Morshead, with the participation of units of the 15th Panzer coming in to the line, as well as the "Ariete" and "Brescia "(Gen. Bartolo Zambon) and of course with the aviation assistance.

There would be preliminary attacks of Stukas in the most important points of the defensive line (hill 209 Mdanar, hill 187 Sahel, hill 173 Giaida). The plan of attack was prepared by the same Rommel and set for 19:30 on 30 April, after an attack by Stukas dive bombers scheduled between the hours of 18:30 to 19:30 simultaneously with the opening of artillery fire on the provided attachment points.

The attack, started well, moving slowly but gradually despite the strong defense of the Australians and continued uninterrupted even for the day of May with the generous aviation assistance attacking positions, fortifications, barricades, batteries, ships in port facilitating advanced of assault troops until the first fortified line of defense perimeter but that resisted stubbornly.

The fight went on continuously in the days 2 and 3 slowed with counterattacks of British tanks backed by strong cannon fire, while WDAF intensified air strikes on Derna, Benghazi, Tripoli (Wellington bombers of Malta) losing a dozen bomber aircraft.

On May 4, the attack could be considered practically failed and the fighting ended the 6th with the loss by the Axis of about 300 dead, 700 wounded, 350 missing largely remained prisoners.

From the second week of May onwards the front of Tobruk stagnated and the British took the opportunity to supply the fortress with fast convoys escorted by 5 fighter squadrons WDAF and FF.AA aircraft.

Between May and June were sent to Tobruk 12 I tanks, 5,000 tons of supplies, reinforcing 6,000 men who replaced 5,000 Australian soldiers, was strengthened A/A. defense with three to four heavy anti-aircraft batteries (39th, 57th, 153rd, 235th) and the 140th Regiment A/A Bofors automatic cannon. Were lost in the reinforcement operation the ships “Fiona” and “Chakla“ attacked by Axis planes.[71]

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Between 1 April and 31 May with the RAF night bombers attacked Tripoli 11 times, Benghazi 16 times, Derna 4 times, Misurata 1 time, performing also with WDAF 234 missions in support of ground troops and losing by the Italian- German fighters and anti-aircraft defense 53 between bombers and fighters. At the same time Axis aviation performed 28 raids on Tobruk, 2 on Marsa Matruh, 2 on Sollum and 528 tactical support missions with the loss of seven Italian and 21 German aircraft shot down by fighters and anti-aircraft fire.

The arrival in Libya the 279th Sqd. Torpedo Bombers (Capt. Orazio Bernardini) based with 6 SM.79 in Berka and Benina and after having replaced the proven 278th which had operated until the end of February, filled the void that had been created in the specialty until May between units of the 5th Air Fleet.

The 279th had absorbed what was left of the 281st and released from the organic dependence of the 34th Group AS became independent and was then assigned to the base in Cyrenaica to obstruct the African side of the transit of maritime convoys from Alexandria to Malta and Tobruk and vice versa.

Previously blocks of the 278th aircraft had occasionally operated from Berka and enemy ships attack occurred April 21 (big steamer torpedoed by Lt. Robone) where 2 SM.79 were took off for the attack on enemy shipping reported at 33° 56'N - 24° 18' E.

As the plane of the Lt. Robone torpedoed the "Lord British" of 6,000 tons, the other three-engine (Capt. Cimolini Oscar) in the return to base at night took the wrong route (probably for RG failure) and was lost forever - the bodies and possessions - 400 km south of Benghazi in the desert, coming only found 5 October 1960 90 km SE of Gialo (SM.79 MM-23881) with the nearby human remains of the valiant crew (pilot M.llo Cesare Barro, SM Amorino De Luca, 1st Av. Quintilius Jaello; STV Oss. Franco Franchi) of the crew missing was Av. Sc. Armiere Giovanni Romanini who was found a few months before several km north of the wreck, after dying of thirst and starvation in the generous attempt to notify the Italian garrisons of the incident on Gialo Giarabub-track and now rested forever after 19 years beside the other aviators of the reconstituted and valiant crew.

On 26 May, the new mission of attack against a naval formation consists of 2 CL and 2 DD. that was attacked by the tri-motor of Lt. Mario Frongia unsuccessfully due to malfunction of the torpedo.

July 11 -For the first time a - CR.42 (S.M. Squassoni) sight at night a "Wellington" that effectively attacks managing to make him release the load of bombs in disorder. The sighting was made easier by the use of a reflector operated by personnel of the 18th CT Group.

July 13 -CR.42 escorting a convoy sighted an enemy submarine that attack with bursts of machine-gun attempting to draw the attention of a Cant.501 with Anti-sub bombs. A steamer sunk by torpedoes from Benghazi to 24 miles (32° 09' Lat.) Had caused the sighting.

July 28 -New Anti-sub mission CR.42 against a British submarine spotted in the Gulf Ghemines. Lt. Neumayer unhooks two 50 kg bombs on the enemy ship which is believed to hit. A Ju.87 of the 239th -Sqd. (Lt. Malvezzi) contributed to the attack on the underwater ship.

August 11 -Two CR.42 the 85th Sqd. accompanying the SM.79 of Gen. Cavallero – Chief of the GSG-in return to Italy.

At the end of the month 279th AS was moved in Derna / El Fteiah to improve its autonomy of action, and in July the Cap. Pil. Giulio Marini replaced Capt. Bernardini in command of the squadron.

Earlier there had been an attempted attack on an enemy formation on June 24 and had attended - Capt. Bernardini and Lt. Frongia as wingman. The attack had had dramatic consequences.

After a failed torpedoing the SM.79 of Capt. Bernardini was attacked by enemy fighters and with dead and wounded on board came to rest on the sea and after transshipping to the raft and that moment began the agonizing adventure survivors. Sergeant Armiere Vito Sinisi seriously injured died after doing a noble conduct as a soldier that earned him the award of a M.O.v.m. in memory; dies later Radio operator S.M. Richard Balagna equally decorated with the M.O.v.m. and in the morning of June 25 the survivors, all injured, will be saved by a Cant. 506/S.

The next mission was carried out on August 13 after numerous offensive reconnaissance in Cyrenaica waters that had not resulted in any concrete offense intervention.[72]

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Action participated Capt. Giulio Marini which struck at estimated position 32° 05' Lat.- 25° 35' Long. 3 DD sailing to the central Mediterranean. Result failure and aircraft hit by the strong anti-aircraft fire of the ships identified for “Jervis” class.

On August 25, the new mission with 2 SM.79 - Capt. Marini, Lt. Frongia -to attack a naval formation spotted in the same location as the previous action. A "Dido" class cruiser hit and badly damaged by the torpedo.

Two days later the 279th participating in a new attacking move with 2 three-engine piloted respectively by Capt. Marini and Lt. Barbani forced the latter to return after taking off for faulty torpedo.

Left alone, the Capt. Marini sighted late evening naval formation reported releasing the torpedo against a cruiser without being able to see the results for the dark and violent A/A fire of the enemy ships.

Was damaged by admission of the British Admiralty the cruiser "Phoebe" 5,000 tons, who will be out for eight months.

Between September and October, the 279th Sqd. effected numerous offensive reconnaissance but no torpedo attack.

In the attacks on Tobruk had particularly distinguished in the meantime the 239th Sqd. Picchiatori [Ju.87] (Capt. G. Cenni), unit this great experience and rely on to have long operated in Greece with considerable success.

The intensity of the fire of the enemy anti-aircraft batteries repeatedly damaged the Ju.87 especially at low altitudes during the flare.

In collaboration with the Stukas of St. G.1st and 2nd Wings, the Italian Picchiatori contributed to the sinking of several ships including military auxiliary ships and cargo ships directed to supply the garrison at Tobruk.

June 29 Ju.87 of the 239th, led by Capt. Cenni, hit full in the center of the DD "Waterhen" which was abandoned on fire and later capsized, after the surviving crew was rescued by the DD “Defender”. An excellent result that the rewarded all the sacrifices endured by the brave unit.

On the 30th was severely damaged the gunboat "Cricket." which was struck the Ju.87 of S.M. Tarantula-one of the protagonists of the sinking of the “Waterhen"-but the brave officer managed to alight and to escape with the raft but gunner 1st Av. Pittini disappeared into the sea, S.M. Tarantula will be saved by a Cant. 501 only 18 hours later.

On July 4, G.50 151st Sqd. (20th Gruppo CT) at the command of Capt. Mario Montefusco, machine-gunned Sidi Barrani, burning 2 Hurricane on the airfields. The plane of Capt. Montefusco was struck who was trying to get back to our lines assisted by his wingman S.M. Mancini who he flanked by at, realizing early on that his commander was also wounded and suffering. The flight continued for several more minutes with a silent dialogue made up of gestures and signs of encouragement when suddenly, after a final salute from the brave pilot, the G.50 fell towards the ground and broke apart.

In memory of Capt. Montefusco will be assigned the M.O.v.m.

On the 22nd, the 2nd CT Group of Lt. Col. Baylon repatriated -a valiant and veteran unit of Africa protagonist of many combat missions and events. The most important change in the English field was the entry into service in the summer of 1941 of the Blenheim IV/IF particularly developed for the assault and tactical support. It equipped with more powerful engines, armament increased with 5 machine guns and bombs to 600 kg, was flying at 430 km/h and had a range of over 2000 km. Represented the direct antagonist Bf.110, the "Destroyer" Luftwaffe but with greater speed (540 km/h) and more powerful armament (5 machine guns, 2 cannons of 20 mm.).

Even the Royal Navy modernized its air component entering into service instead of the obsolete "Sea Gladiator” and “Fulmar” embarked the Grumman F4F.3" Wildcat fighter "US construction, called by the RAF the “Martlet” with 530 km speed/h and 4 machine guns as weapons.

We already mentioned the WDAF began to receive more and more massively from the USA the Curtiss P.40 "Tomahawk" and "Kittyhawk" (fighter version and fighter/bomder with engines performance between 1040-1160 HP and other weapons), the twin-engine light bombing Glenn Martin "Maryland" and "Baltimore" very fast and equal in this aspect at the best Italian fighters of the time, the maritime patrol Lockheed “Hudson” to be attached in the medium-range missions (autonomy 2,400 km) to replace the “Sunderland” now present in small numbers in the Mediterranean.[73]

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But all these machines acquired in the US, the British introduced and assigned to WDAF the new twin-engine for the assault/night fighter the Bristol "Beaufighter" MK II/F, powerfully armed with four 20 mm cannons and 6 cal machine guns. 7.7, speeds above 540 km/h, about 2,000 km range. A genuine flying scourge that represented the terror of the Axis motorized-mechanized vehicles for the duration of the conflict in North Africa.

The Beaufighters made their debut on 28 July over Derna, seriously damaging 4 SM.79s and 2 CR.42s attacked on the El Fteiah airfield. The FN version had the A.I. night search radar with a range of 8-10 km linked to the GCI.

July 29, came into action the 209th Sqd. Picchiatori (Capt. Romanese) attacking together with German Stukas an oil tanker and other means of direct landing at Tobruk sinking one and severely damaging the tanker. Attacked by P.40s the Germans lost 3 Ju.87 but two Curtiss were shot down by the Bf.109 of JG.27. The aircraft of S. Lt. Longoni was damaged badly enough to force the pilot to alight and take refuge with the gunner Av. Sc. Petrellese on the raft that disappeared forever despite the frantic search carried out with air-sea rescue and many squadron pilots.

August 2 new attack of the Italian-German Stukas on a convoy escorted by DDs and "Tomahawk" which shot down 2 Ju.87s of the St. G.1 but, attacked by Messerschmitt 109s of the 27th Fighter Wing, had 3 aircraft shot down in combat.

August 12 -The 18th Group Aut. CT (Cmdr. interim Capt. G. Lodi) received orders to return in rotation to Italy. It will be replaced by the 160th Group Aut. CT (Sqd. 375th/393rd/394th) under the command of Lt. Col. F. Zanni.

In August they followed attacks on Tobruk always opposed by the base's formidable anti-aircraft and was hit the Ju.87 of S. Lt. Ragonese landed without further problems in an emergency situation.

Between 19-29 August, part of the Tobruk garrison, which had been under siege by the Axis for 4 months, was replaced by a massive air-naval deployment. 6,100 soldiers arrived with 1,300 tons of materials and 5,000 Australians were evacuated. The CL. «Phoebe» and the DD. «Nizam» suffered damage from air attacks.

Another exodus occurred during the period 19 to 27 September. Arrived the English 70th Inf. Brigade (70th Div.) and 4th Regt., a total of 6,300 men and 2,000 tons of materials. Between October 12 to 25 arrived the rest of the 70th Inf. Div. and returned to Alexandria what remained of the Australian 9th Div. Two merchant ships and one minelayer were lost.

Command of the garrison passed from Gen. Morshead to Gen. Scobie.

In total were evacuated from Tobruk 47,280 soldiers of the 8th Army including Italian and German prisoners and 34,113 British came with 33,496 tons of materials. The dead were 855, 2,500 injured and 500 missing.

Were lost 34 warships and transports, 33 more were damaged between April and October.

Instead no rotation occurred for the Italian soldiers of the infantry divisions for long months in the line and severely affected by the fighting and life in the Marmarico desert.[74]

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The Western Desert Royal Air Force

After the advance in Libya which ended in January 1941 with the conquest of Cyrenaica and stop at the edge of the Sirtica, the WDAF who had suffered a major attrition in two long months of struggle, it was rearranged and changed its original structure.

Much of the Squadrons employed came back for technical reorganization and assignment of new material and for a tactical training cycle. In the occupied territories was constituted the Q.G./WDAF Cyrenaica (Col. L.O. Brown) based at Benina 3rd Sqdn. RAAF and at Bu Amud the 73rd of Hurricane, in Maraua 55th Sqdn. Blenheim; sections of the 6th Sqdn. Aero-cooperation of Lysander were at Barce and Ajdabiya.

The main task of Cyrenaica Advanced Tactical Air Command consisted in supporting the Australian 9th Inf. Div. and part of the 6th located forward in Marsa el Brega/Ajdabiya area. For this purpose detachments of observation aircraft had been transferred to Antelat and Msus.

These provisions were adopted after an inspection carried out in February by the British Chief of the Armed Forces GSG Gen. John Dill accompanied by Gen. Wavell.

On March 24, while the “Sqdn. A” of the LRDG started from El Fayum for a mission to Gialo, the Italian-German troops attacked the British outposts in the Sirtica occupied el Agheila starting the Axis counter-offensive of 1941. The presence of German troops in Libya had been established since February 21 from photographic reconnaissance had reported the presence of Sd. Kfs.231 type armored car with 8 wheels, unmistakably Germanic model.

The WDAF command arraigned to send reinforcements to Cyrenaica transferring the 257th Bombardment Wing with Wellingtons.

In February, it was found to be present in Sicily also of German planes, whose appearance had previously been considered occasional and experimental.

The embarked air component was also improved with the award to the Mediterranean of the CV "Formidable" instead of the damaged “Illustrious”, with FAA Sqdn. 803rd, 806th, 826th and 829th with Fulmar, Albacore and Swordfish. In early April, the WDAF was deployed as follows:

204th Group (Air Commodore A. Collishaw) comprising:

73rd Sqdn. Hurricane	Tobruk
274th Sqdn. Hurricane	Gerawla
14th Sqdn. Blenheim	Burg el Arab
39th Sqdn. Glenn Martin	Maaten Baqqush[75]

75 **La Western Desert Royal Air Force**

Dopo l'avanzata in Libia conclusasi nel gennaio 1941 con la conquista della Cirenaica e la sosta ai margini della Sirtica, la WDAF che aveva subito un forte logoramento nei due lunghi mesi di lotta, venne riordinata e modificata nella sua struttura iniziale.

Gran parte degli Squadroni dipendenti venne arretrata per riordinamento tecnico e assegnazione di nuovo materiale e per un ciclo di addestramento tattico. Nei territori occupati venne costituito il Q.G./WDAF Cirenaica (Col. L.O. Brown) che disponeva a Benina del 3° Sq dn. RAAF e a Bu Amud del 73° su Hurricane, a Maraua del 55° Sqdn. Blenheim; sezioni del 6o Sqdn. Da aerocooperazione su Lysander erano a Barce e Agedabia.

Compito principale del comando aereo avanzato Cirenaica consisteva nell'appoggio tattico alla 9a Div. Ftr. australiana e a parte della 6a dislocate in avanti nella zona di Marsa el Brega/Agedabia. A tale scopo distaccamenti di velivoli da osservazione erano stati trasferiti ad Antelat e Msus.

Tali disposizioni erano state adottate dopo una ispezione compiuta in febbraio dal Capo di SMG delle FF.AA. britanniche Gen. John Dill accompagnato dal Gen. Wavell.

Il 24 marzo mentre lo Sqdn. A del LRDG partiva da El Fayum per una missione a Gialo, truppe italo-tedesche attaccavano gli avamposti inglesi nella Sirtica occupando El Agheila dando inizio alla controffensiva del 1941 dell'Asse. La presenza di truppe tedesche in Libia era stata accertata sin dal 21 febbraio dalla ricognizione fotografica che aveva segnalato la presenza di autoblindo tipo Sd. Kfs.231 a 8 ruote, di modello inconfondibilmente germanico.

Il comando WDAF **provvedeva** ad inviare rinforzi in Cirenaica trasferendo il 257o Wing da bombardamento con Wellingtons.

In febbraio venne accertata la presenza in Sicilia anche di aerei tedeschi, la cui apparizione in precedenza era stata ritenuta occasionale e sperimentale.

La componente aerea imbarcata venne ugualmente migliorata con l'assegnazione nel Mediterraneo della n.p.o. «Formidable» al posto della danneggia « Illustrious » , con gli Sqdn. F AA 803°, 806°, 826o e 829o con Fulmar, Albacore e Swordfish. Ai primi di aprile la WDAF risultava così articolata:

204o Group (Air Commodore A. Collishaw) comprendente:

73o Sqdn. su Hurricane	Tobruk
274° Sqdn. su Hurricane	Gerawla
14o Sqdn. su Blenheim	Burg el Arab

39° Sqdn. su Glenn Martin Maaten Baqqush

24th Sqdn. Glenn Martin Fuka (SAAF)
45th Sqdn. Blenheim Fuka
55th Sqdn. Blenheim Zimla
6th Sqdn. Hurricane/ Lysander of Tobruk (reconnaissance /aero-coop.)
257th Sqdn. in maintenance at Fuka with Wellington.

The aviation personnel sent to Egypt in the first quarter 1941 accounted for 13,000 to the units leading to a total of more than 30,000 men the strength of the RAF in the Middle East theater of operations. Other 240,000 soldiers went to the Army reinforcement and 6,000 to the Royal Navy for rotation and new G.U.s

The average total of unloaded supplies in the Egyptian ports was 5,000 tons daily and the US delivered 7,000 vehicles in much of the heavy type previously ordered.

Between January and October, the RAF/ME received just under 2,000 new airplanes coming via Takoradi and the United States, to the point that with these reinforcements was possible to start a program of rearmament, training and equipment for new flight units French, Greek, Polish, Yugoslavs.

The breakdown of the aircraft received the first 10 months was as follows:

Blenheim No. 471
Hurricane No. 857
Beaufighter No. 36
Lysander No. 29
Beaufort No. 12
Wellington No. 146
Bombay No. 15
Gladiator No. 10
Maryland No. 109 (Martin A.22)
Tomahawk / Kittyhawk No. 294 (P.40 Curtiss B-D)
Boston No. 7 (Douglas DB.7B)
Lodestar No. 7 (Lockheed C.56)
Martlet No. 16 (Grumman F4F.3)

The presence of US flight material (over 560 aircraft) sent through the Lend Lease Act (Leases and Loans Law) of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, was beginning to be felt gradually its weight and its importance in the ranks of the Royal Air Force.

From a qualitative point of view there had been placing in the units of WDAF P.40 fighter version of the Curtiss fighter and fighter/bomber (respectively P.40/D called "Kittyhawk" and P.40/B that the RAF named "Tomahawk"), Hawker "Hurricane" MK II by more powerful engine (1,280 HP) in tactical support version (the MK II/C) armed with four Hispano 20 mm cannons for the attack on armored vehicles; They were also awarded Bristol "Beaufighter" equipped with A.I. radar equipment (Air Interceptor) from night fighter with a powerful armament. In the bombing there was a certain improvement in quality with the entry into service of Blenheim MK IV with upgraded engines, more weaponry and ordnance.

Beginning in July 1941, the first line of WDAF swayed in average between 650-700 aircraft in the line and arrived a few months later among the 800-850 aircraft which were to be added embarked the aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm oscillating between 100-120 specimens occurred in, certain moments in the presence in the Mediterranean the CV "Furious," "Victorious," "Formidable" and "Ark Royal" engaged for urgent transport aircraft reinforcements destined for the Middle East.

The Lend Lease went into operation in March 1941, foresaw its wartime supplies to Britain and among the first deliveries included 40 Grumman fighters, M.3 "Grant" and M.3 A1 "Stuart" tanks in place of English models A.9 and A.10 considered obsolete; other fighter planes were scheduled to Greece and Yugoslavia.

For England were made available 42 transport ships on the route to the Suez Canal via the Cape of Good Hope and the end of July had arrived in the Egyptian ports 10,000 trucks, 84 “Stuart” tanks, 174 airplanes, 24 AA guns, field pieces and several tens of thousands of tons of war materials together in groups of technicians in charge of instructing the English soldiers on new military equipment "made in USA". The difficulties to convey supplies and especially aircraft crossing the Mediterranean in the Middle East, advised in 1941 improved route via Takoradi whose organization was entrusted to Air Vice Marshall G.G. Dawson. It was improved and enhanced the system of aviation-maintenance repairs in Egypt, decentralizing systems, expanding the technical infrastructure, employing thousands of Egyptian civilians, especially women.[76]

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In June Air Marshall Longmore was replaced as commander of RAF/Middle East by his peer Air Marshal A.W. Tedder who had until then served as Inspector of the RAF. Under the command of Q.G. of the Imperial Armed Forces Middle East, the Cabinet of War, at the proposal of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, appointed Gen. Claude Auchinleck that on 5 July he took possession of his high office and thereby, to the situation of the M.O. command summit in addition to the Chiefs of the RAF and Army and Admiral Cunningham commander M.F., saw Gen. N. Beresford-Peirse leading the Western Desert Force (later 8th Army), Deputy Commander of WDAF, Air Vice Marshall R.M. Drummond with the Chief of Staff Air Vice Marshall H.E.P. Wigglesworth.

The structuring of the Royal Air Force was presented at the end of 1941 thus:

201st Group Commander G.M. Bryer (later Commodore L.H. Slatter)
202nd Group Commodore R. Collishaw (later Commodore T.W. Elmhirst)
205th Group Commodore L.L. Mac Lean
206th Group Commodore C.B. Cooke
204th Group Group Commander L.O. Brown (later V. Air Marshall A. Coningham)
peripheral commands RAF/ME
H.Q/RAF -Israel Commander S.D. Culley
H.Q/RAF - Iraq V. Air Marshall J.H. d'Albiac
H.Q/RAF -Aden V. Air Marshal G.R.M. reid
207th Group -East Africa Commodore W. Sowrey
203rd Group -Sudan Commodore L.H. Slatter
H.Q./RAF -Malta V. Air Marshall F.H.M. Maynard (later H.P. Lloyd)

The major British airports identified by the SIA and marked with their geographical coordinates in the western sector of Egypt, were:

Galala S.E. (31° 00' N.-28° 14' E.)
Sanyet el Qoteifiya (31° 02 'N.-28° 18' E.)
Abu Haggag (31° 08' N.-27° 46' E.)
Abar Nimeir (31 ° 08' 30" N. 27° 50'E.)
Sanyet el Kasaba (31° 08' N-27° 28' E.)
Alan Smeit (31° 07 'N.- 27° 46' E.)
Fuka West (31° 04 ' N- 27° 49' E.)

It was 7 airfields located on the same latitude and between 27 ° -28 ° degree longitude, at short distance from each other (between the 220th and 240th km of the Alexandria-Marsa Matruk rail line).

The grandeur of the reinforcements in men and material received from the British Command for the Middle East, contrasted with what they had availability as the Italian Armed Forces in Libya and provided a telling sign of the difficulties that lay before the Italian soldiers of each Arm, confront and beat the powerful opponent relying only on armaments supplied and the quality of the equipment.

More onerous and difficult confrontation resulted aviation not only by the number of available aircraft because especially for the technological quality: Hurricane and P.40 for fighters, Beaufighter/Beaufort for combat, Blenheim and Boston for the bombing, that had significantly high and significantly improved the level of performance of the WDAF.[77]

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The Summer Battle - operation "Brevity"

The rapid and disastrous loss in just 2 weeks of Cyrenaica, which had cost to the 8th Army 2 long and hard months of battle to conquer the Italians, had alarmed and worried a high extent the Churchill Government and London began to encourage and solicit, almost daily the HQ/ME Cairo, so that with the substantial forces available implements a range of initiatives to counter and reject the Axis forces on the starting positions now that supplies flowed constantly measure and copious. These stresses were at the end of June favorable echo, since excluding the loss of Greece and Crete, is positively opposed the conquest of Syria, the suffocation of Iraqi rebellion and the favorable progress of the campaign in East Africa against the Italian garrison who had created more favorable strategic opportunities, political and military to reorganize the British forces and make them more available for new initiatives in Libya. In the field of the Axis, in analogy with what was happening to the British, it was a maturing period of reflection and evaluation about what to do with the Italian-German commands undecided between the strengthening of the positions or continue the advance being suggested as a more Rommel said. But the tenacious defense of Tobruk had convinced Rommel for the first time that the war in the desert was not always addressed in a rush but reasonably applied and analyzed, and perhaps the first failures in the initial campaign of DAK, managed to reconcile moderate ambitions and unscrupulous initiatives of the German General bringing it closer to Italian concepts. In mid-May the units to maintain the siege of Tobruk were composed mainly of Italian soldiers and the entire DAK, went to the east towards the Egyptian border, with the 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions (formerly 5th Div. Light) supported by much of the Flieger Fuhrer Afrika.

It was a forward movement of the armored units, deployment on a natural resistance line, running along the escarpment from Sollum towards the interior of the western Egyptian desert, this high rampart on the 200 meters and passable only at three passes crossed by the roadway: high Sollum, Halfaya, Bir Sofafi.

The sector was defended by some motorized units of the Div. "Trent" and "Ariete", by the 3rd Recon Bn reinforced with a German motorized infantry Battalion supported by tanks and artillery.

A total of about 4,500 Italian and German soldiers scattered among Sollum and Halfaya.[78]

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The smallness of the forces of the axis and the prospect, advance by the Information Service, the arrival on the front of a new Panzer units, convinced Gen. Wavell of the urgency of action against the Axis positions to burst through and spread towards Capuzzo-Bardia bypassing the deployment of Halfaya, freeing Tobruk and fulfilling at the same time the solicitations of Churchill.

Arose in this way, with these premises, operation "Brevity" (Brevity) under the command of Gen. Gott, which provided for attachment of 5 Motorized Inf. battalions., 4 groups of artillery, a armored cars Battalion, 1 Tank Battalion (50 of Cruiser and Mathilda). Air support was provided by the 14th Sqdn. with "Blenheim" Bombers and by the 274th with Hurricane backed by assault twin-engine MK IV/F of the 45th and 55th Sqdns. which were to attack positions and moving columns with over a hundred aircraft.

Together with the tried and tested Army units, the WDAF was also going through a dangerous period of crisis, to the point that after the reorganisation of the 204th Operations Group entrusted to V. Air Marshall Collishaw who had included in its staff the 258th Wing and the newly formed 253rd Wing specifically intended for tactical support, the RAF /ME command had to request the transfer of the 1st SAAF returning from the AOI and destined for the defence of the Suez Canal, while waiting for the 3rd RAAF and the 250th Sqdn. to complete the transition and training on the American Curtiss «Tomahawk» aircraft which the RAF was receiving in considerable numbers.

It was not possible to assign new aircraft in the defense of Tobruk and convoys escort for the supply of the fortress occurred with twin-engine “Blenheim” IV/F long-range fighter with special armament and with a few Hurricane with additional tanks.

In early May returned to Egypt the remains of decimated squads sent to the Balkans and was promptly began their rebuilding with new arrived flight material from Takoradi.

It also awaited the arrival of the first Curtiss P .40 "Kittyhawk" fighter which in number of 560 copies had been included in the US "Lend/Lease” plan and the Imperial Q.G. had intended exclusively for the Middle East.

In May, as mentioned, the Air Chef Marshall Longmore had been replaced in the command RAF/ME by his peer Tedder, who continued the work of the reorganization WDAF inserting in the month the new 250th Sqdn. Equipped with "Tomahawk" (P.40/B) with increased armament and caters specifically for the assault, but still not fully trained.

Obviously interested in Operation "Brevity", Marshal Tedder believed he could use more then the 4 squadrons assigned (14th, 45th, 55th, 274th) also the 113th of “Blenheim” IV/F, if the phase technical preparations had been completed in before the first week of May.

The British action began by surprise at dawn on 15 May and quickly achieved some success at Halfaya first and then at the Capuzzo Redoubt, and allowed the advance further south of an armoured brigade intended to exploit the success and to aid the penetration of reserve motorised and armoured units.

Rommel, warned enemy initial success, detached eastward some units of the 15th Panzer under the command of Gen. Neumann-Sylkow reinforced by a Flak group with 13 88/56 guns and a anti-tank Battalion with 12 guns 50/60 and 21 of 37/40. After a battle between tanks near Sidi Azeiz, the British were forced to retreat with heavy losses (20 I tanks, guns, materials, vehicles and more than a thousand men) against loss of about thirty fallen Italian-German and just over 500 prisoners captured between Halfaya and Sollum.

The "Brevity" was over briefly and negatively for the British. The WDAF, who had actively participated in “Brevity” with bomber and assault missions on the front, attacks on the Axis airfields at Sidi Azeiz, Ain Gazala, Derna, for those lost in combat or shooting anti-aircraft 10 aircraft between Hurricane , Tomahawk, Maryland and many others were damaged.

The Italian-German air force was particularly active and is particularly distinguished the 27th JG. (Maj. Neumann) and 2nd Group CT (Lt. Col. Baylon) who were engaged in fighting with the British fighters.

For tactical support they participated in the I/St. G.1, the 239th Sqd. Dive bombers, the 83rd C.B. of Capt. Molinari with CR.42 B.A. who attacked several times the enemy armored columns with bombs and strafing between Sollum, Capuzzo, Sidi Omar, Halfaya. Unfortunately there was a misunderstanding on the battlefield identification with the Germans Ju.87 attack on an Italian column with the killing of 50 soldiers and wounding many others.[79]

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Rommel severely punished the commander of the Group, Major Heymer, responsible for the error.

In the fighting 4 G.50 they were seriously damaged and had to make emergency landings at Sidi Azeiz.

The revelation and the failure of “Brevity” in the analysis made by the British, was the Krupp-aircraft cannon. mod. Flak 36/41 of 88/56, which was also used in anti-tank function with deadly results, and that was the real star of the fighting against the British armored vehicles. Modest results were obtained as always with the SM.79 and BR.20 bombers.

The most worrying aspect for the Italian Air Force emerged in the spring-summer 1941, was the finding that the bombing altitude was low effectiveness against targets in the desert made up of motorized columns, field stations, defenses, and this explains eloquently the modest presence of traditional bombers SM.79/BR.20 in the 5th Air Fleet units (20%) compared to 70% in June 1940 which was the bomber component on the staff of Aviation of Libya.

To this add after the major technical difficulties with respect to environmental conditions (the Cant.1007 not find effective use in Libya because of their wooden construction entirely subject to detachments and warping).

The huge theater of operations on the ground of the desert represented the unchallenged rule of the tank and in the sky the more congenial aspect aviation tactical support: dive bombers, fighter bombers, assault.

Such a glaring reality had found a lot of credit in the WDAF – articulated in essentially tactical function to the extent of 80% (Blenheim, Hurricane A/T, "Tomahawk") and even the Luftwaffe had established with Fieger Fuhrer Afrika essentially a component of tactical support to the extent 85% initial workforce -Ju.87/Bf.110 - lack the presence of Ju.88 dive bombers because of existing maintenance problems on African fields for machines of such great efficacy but delicate tuning.

The Italian Air Force had not demonstrated the same flexibility and foresight since, despite having inverted the percentage ratio in 1941 in favour of the fighters this time, it had not promptly prepared suitable assault units. After the dissolution of the 50th Stormo, the finial striking of the Ba.65 and the downgrading of the CR.32 formations, no longer had any suitable aircraft for tactical support, if you exclude the few Ju.87 gotten from Germany and suitable for limited and special offensive missions and experimental adaptation of some CR.42 to carry two bombs of 50 kg in under-wing mounts.

It was thought that this shortcoming could be filled with a greater presence of fighters but the inadequate armament (2 synchronized weapons) did not allow the desired results to be obtained unless on targets represented by something other than the well-protected British armored tanks.

Six months later, after the DAK's debut in Libya, and with the analysis of the results made by the OKW, Germany began to look with greater interest at the new battlefront in which it had entered, judging the Mediterranean theater of great strategic and political importance and therefore certainly deserving of wider interests in the global strategy of its war.

The Wehrmacht was firmly established in Yugoslavia, Greece and Crete, Sicily and Libya; in part it had arrived there by fighting and conquering space and freedom of action, in part it was there because it had been specifically invited by Italy to greater military collaboration.

The analysis of the existing and past situation, had allowed the Reich to assess actual and real capacities and possibilities that offered the allied Italy and judge certainly below expectations that could express politically, military, operational, strategic: a group of modest proportions that certainly the Reich with shrewd politics and concrete possibilities could change to its advantage!

The military defeats suffered by Italy in Greece and Libya, the presence of the DAK and Rommel's victories in Cyrenaica, gave Germany even more certainty: Italy could no longer do without German help!

In this situation of psychological privilege gradually is inserted the Germanic policy penetration to take on an increasingly important role in the Mediterranean.

On 24 May 1941 the OKW put forward the proposal to the S.C. to insert into the Higher Command of the Armed Forces of the ASI its own "Liaison Staff" which was to have the purpose of acting as an intermediary between the DAK and the Higher Command of the ASI, to provide the OKW HQ with an updated situation, suggesting indications for strengthening the DAK, providing for its needs, logistical problems, transport, security, completely freeing the DAK from such duties, studying plans to submit to the OKW for future operations in Egypt.[80]

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On 1 July the German proposal was authorized by the Duce after consultation with the Chief of the GSG, although this measure did not meet the unconditional approval of Gen. Gariboldi and particularly Rommel, who saw a potential danger to his undisputed leadership authority of the DAK.

To head the G.S.C. (Deutschen Verbidung beim Italienischen Nord Afrika Kommand [German liaison with the Italian North Africa Command]) in Libya was appointed Gen. Alfred Gause with a retinue of 220 people between officers, non-commissioned officers, rank and file, this number deemed excessive for the performance of tasks is in charge [under the command] of the High Command ASI that the command DAK: an initiative that baffled both commands!

In late April the OKL (Ober Kommand der Deutschen Luftwaffe) ordered the transfer of the X Flieger Korps to Greece to participate together with the VIII in operation “Merkur” (attack from the sky on Crete) and in early May the German units they began in stages to leave the Sicilian airports and moved into the new operating sector.

As of 30 April, the German X Air Corps had lost in little more than three months of continuous activity of Malta, the central and eastern Mediterranean and Libya, 107 aircraft mostly bombers and Stukas and specifically Ju.88: 22% of staff established at the end of April 1941.

OPERATION "BATTLE AXE”

The new British failure at the border with Libya had occurred with "Brevity", did not discourage Churchill and the British War Cabinet, since the subjective impression that they attempted to extract was the one that Rommel was not unbeatable and that a new operation, set with greater breadth of vision and effort compared to the "Brevity", they could give very different results. It arose from these stresses operation "Battle Axe."

In consequence of this tantalizing prospect Churchill resumed with greater pressure to urge Gen. Wavell wisely and with remarkable foresight and concrete affirmation to his request, he ordered, on its own initiative, even before "Brevity" was attempted and prepared "Battle Axe”, sending a fast supply convoy to Egypt, going directly through the Mediterranean, rather than the safest but overly long circumnavigation via the Cape of Good Hope, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and Suez.

The convoy had the conventional name, "Tiger" and taking advantage of an exceptional luck in consideration also of the absence of the X Flieger Korps from Sicily engaged in the Battle of Crete, reached the Egyptian port with the only loss of a single ship with 57 tanks and 10 Hurricane of the five that made it up, landing at Alexandria 238 tanks, 180 cannons, 43 Hurricane.

The contrast to the "Tiger" convoy was led firmly by the Italian torpedo bombers which has the merit of having attacked the English ships while suffering painful losses, given the absence of contact with the Italian Navy surface ships, not occurred despite numerous reports promptly transmitted by scouts to the Supermarina and the Supreme Command and the operation of aircraft of Sardinia, Sicily and Libya.

The units assigned to "Battle Axe" included both veterans and valiant units of the Western Desert Force: The 4th Indian Infantry and the famous 7th Armored Div. retrofitted with the new "Crusader" tank (cruiser tank mod A.15) of 15 tons. with rapid-fire cannon of 40 mm and high speed, in addition to the proven but outdated "Mathilda" of 24 tons with lower speed (24 km/h) than the "Crusader" (48 km/h). There was also the reinforced by the 22nd "Guards" Armoured Brigade, the service units, logistic and technical support.

The plan of attack had been prepared this time by General Beresford-Pierse, the commander WDF and provided the breakthrough of Halfaya pass, an outflanking attack south of Sollum to join with the right group at Halfaya, an enveloping attack on the south by 7th Armored Div. to provoke a clash with the Axis armored forces, if they moved from the rear where they were in the defense of Halfaya - Sollum and threatened from two sides.

Gen. Creagh of the 7th Armoured Div., Great expert of armored troops, had been entrusted with the task to tackle and beat the German panzer and the M.13 tanks of the “Ariete”.[81]

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Opposing the WDF, the Axis units included the following forces in the 1st line strongholds: at *Sollum*: 200 riflemen with mortars and 47/32 guns of the "Trento"; at *Musaid*: 220 riflemen with mortars and 47/32 anti-tank from the “Trento”; at *Capuzzo*: 200 Italian and 30 German riflemen with two 37/40 antitank - two isolated strongpoints with Italian and German artillery reinforced by 20/65 machine guns and 37 anti-tank; at *Halfaya*: 400 Italian soldiers of the "Trento" with a battery 100/17, 4 anti-tank, units of Engineers -500 German infantry soldiers with a 88/56 battery, 4 37 mm. anti-tank, four 20 mm. machine guns. In the area of Bardia were deployed the 15th Panzer, a Regiment of the “Trento” reinforced with two artillery groups, elements of the 21st Panzer (ex 5th Light Division). Small armored recon units were staggered on ahead to south along the fence, the "Graziani".

The air support of WDAF would be provided by the 204th Group that could deploy 128 bombers and 116 single-engine/twin-engine fighter aircraft for tactical support.

The preparation of the "Battle Axe" would be preceded by intense day and night bombing of Benghazi and the airports of Cyrenaica. The new commander of the Air Marshall Arthur Tedder WDAF had set busily to work to rearrange anew the Western Desert Air Force, could field only 240 reasonably efficient aircraft out of the 1044 that the RAF/ME had in charge at the beginning of June; but the justification there was the loss between April-May of about 400 aircraft and a number of trained pilots lost from the organic tables to the disastrous campaigns in Greece and Crete, the presence in Ethiopia of a hundred planes still engaged in E.A., the location in the turbulent arena of the Middle East (Iraq-Syria-Palestine) approximately another 300 airplanes. The rest was under repair in the Delta and in the Canal area and the remnants of reserves as efficient as were the outdated aircraft withdrawn from the line and assigned to training of pilots British, Australian, South African, French, Greek and Yugoslav at airports of the Middle East.

But all these difficulties were considered transient because a vast program of reinforcements in aircraft and personnel for the RAF had been prepared by the Imperial G.S. (organic expansion from 17,600 to 26,000 men), and its implementation was considered to be only a matter of time.

The trans-African route between Takoradi and Suez would have been further enhanced with the influx of a large number of British and American planes, and in this the long but safe supply path which would have added one more short but perilous through the Mediterranean via Malta, for which they were prepared transfer plans with the use of aircraft carriers of the "Royal Navy", realizing the upgrading of Malta and the RAF/ME by sending first Hurricanes and then Spitfires.

The Axis could deploy: *FI.Fu. Afrika*: 79 bombers between Ju.87/Ju.88 and 76 fighters single/twin-engine B.109/Bf. 110. *The 5th Air Fleet* possessed day 49 bombers SM.79/BR.20 and 156 fighters between G.50, CR.42 and MC.200.

The Luftwaffe had taken steps to enhance only minimally the Fl.Fu. Afrika since the bulk of German aviation was assigned to Operation "Barbarossa."

The largest Italian aviation presence that had passed with surprising vitality of winter-spring 1941 crisis, was greatly enhanced, had furnished from scratch new airfields, reconstituted reserves, prepared deposition, strategic materials, reorganized technical services, logistics, health care; replaced the more people tried with another arrived from Italy.

The 5th Air Fleet Command had tried to be as night fighters units to counter the frequent raids on Tripoli and Benghazi in Wellington but the lack of suitable material, joint training with DICAT and other objective difficulties had rejected any attempt.

Situation of the 5th Air Fleet (01 June 1941)

8th Stormo BT	24	SM.79
98th Group Aut. BT	12	BR.20
239th Sqd. Aut. B.a.T.	10	Ju.87
279th Sqd. AS.	4	SM.79
2nd Group Aut. CT	26	G.50
18th Group Aut. CT	25	CR.42
374th Sqd. Aut.	11	MC.200
20th Group Aut. CT	36	G.50
151st Group Aut. CT	36	CR.42
155th Group Aut. CT	27	G.50
376th Sqd. Aut. CT	12	CR.42
236th Sqd. Aut. B.a.T.	11	Ju.87.
174th Sqd. Aut. RST	7	SM.79
175th Sqd. Aut. RST	11	SM.79
145th Sqd. RM	14	Cant.501
15th Group OA	13	Ca.311[82]

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67th Group OA	21	Ro.37
1st Group APC	20	Ca.309
2nd Group APC	4	Ca.309
Saharan Battalion.	19	Ca.309

THE ENGLISH ATTACK

If Creagh's plan had succeeded, ensuring the WDF control of the strategic triangle Halfaya-Capuzzo-Bardia (much was also counted on the intervention of the Tobruk garrison), the conditions would have been created for a decisive battle in the Tobruk-Sidi Azeiz area which could have ended positively for the British, considering the armament and equipment received, now available to a greater extent to the 8th Army compared to the Axis, which had been going through a period of crisis for some time due to the lack of fuel availability caused by the sinkings.

The attack method followed the traditional English one already tested with great success against the Italians in 1940, in the presumption, later proven to be fallacious, that the English armament in terms of tanks could be considered technically superior to the German ones, underestimating the Pz. Mark III tank (Sd. Kfz. 141) with the 50/42 gun weighing 23 tons and a speed of 40 km/h and the heavier Pz. IV (Sd. Kfz. 161/ A) with the 75/24 gun, weighing 25 tons, and a speed of 40 km/h. But an even more bitter surprise was reserved by the DAK for the English armored units with the field use for anti-tank purposes of the 88/56 Flak gun, of which they had had a first shocking demonstration of the destructive power during the "Brevity"!

The relationship between opposing armored forces saw in the line between the British about 200 tanks against 170 Germans, whereas the rest of the German armored vehicles (about thirty) was around Tobruk along with L.35 and M.13 tanks of the “Ariete”.

Aerial reconnaissance had reported several days earlier the presence in the Sidi Barrani area of British tanks and Rommel had had ample time to prepare defenses, place extensive minefields, strengthened with the 88’s in advanced positions by having them bury wire in the ground, spread in carefully chosen areas the tanks of the 15th Panzer camouflaging them perfectly, and now waited quietly the English attack ready to operate with the professional expertise that was his. The English attack began at 04:30 hours on 15 June with an artillery preparation on a front width of about 40 km from Sollum to Sidi Omar, preceded and followed by heavy air strikes on the position of Halfaya and strafing and dropping 50 kg bombs on fire centers, concentrations of vehicles, batteries. 06:30 is made under the armored vehicles followed by the infantry but the heavy “Matilda" were destroyed one after another by the guns and deadly accurate Flak 88 shooting and the infantry remained uncovered decimated by fire of the artillery and automatic weapons. The armored columns lateral to the defilade could instead to progress towards Capuzzo, Bir Hafid and surrounding units.

At 10:00 Rommel had to combine rapidly a complete view of the events, he sensed the British plan to release Tobruk and expecting an attack behind the besiegers of the stronghold’s garrison, arresting the movement of the 21st Panzer eastward entrusting only to the 15th a responsibility to address the enemy armored forces. The possibility of an attack from Tobruk advised him to make available to the besieging forces also the “Montemurro” Mobile Group of "Ariete”, which was moved to the west in an intermediate position. Numerous tactical interventions in the Halfaya area had been brought by Hurricane of the 274th Sqdn. and Blenheim of the 14th. In the evening the English had slowly progressed in the area of Capuzzo while suffering heavy losses in armored vehicles, while in the Halfaya area had remained firm on initial positions having suffered major damage and losses in infantry men and “Matilda" tanks.

On the 16th Rommel counterattacked in Hafid-Capuzzo area with tanks of the 15th Panzer reinforced by elements of the 21st arrived in the night, and there was a messy battle of armored vehicles in which the German tanks had the better under the ballistic profile for the greater range of their guns with a position difference will be not less than 2500/3000 meters and the destructive power of the armor-piercing grenades (Pz. Gr. mod. 40). Further south also attacked the 21st Panzer now under the command of Gen. Neumann Silkow, and the sorely tried units of the 7th Armored had no other alternative but to withdraw to avoid being destroyed completely. Even "Battle Axe" had resulted in a crushing defeat for the English and the same Churchill saw fit not to insist further.

On the 17th the battle headed for the conclusion.[83]

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The garrison of Tobruk had desisted from engaging in any offensive relief initiative.

To avoid being trapped and isolated at Capuzzo and Halfaya, Gen. Messervy Commander 4th Inf. Div., who was in the most critical situations, made on his own initiative and without consulting his superiors ordered a retreat to Egypt by involving in his decision also the 7th Armored Div. In the afternoon at 4pm the tanks with Rommel in the lead reached Halfaya, freeing the brave Italian-German garrison that had resisted the English attacks for three days.

English casualties among dead, wounded and prisoners were about a thousand men, to 700 German, a little less than the Italian losses. Objectively analyzing the results of "Battle Axe" and armaments fielded by both sides, it was obvious that the myth of the invulnerability of “Matilda" infantry tanks was finally destroyed by the new German guns 88/56 mod. 41 and that the - qualitative comparison of the new "Crusader" fielded by the British did not survive to the finding of the proven Panzer Mark III/IV of Rommel, for mechanical quality, ballistic, maneuverability and finally training of Germanic tank crews.

What would have happened if the 200 modern and powerful British tanks had been before the L.35 or M.13/41 tanks of the “Ariete”, the old and outdated 75/27 or 100/17 and mediocre 47/32 antitank gun that did not stop them at Sidi Barrani, Bardia, Tobruk and Bede Fomm in the first offensive Wavell?

It is a question that unfortunately leaves in its eloquent answer no doubt whatsoever, whereas in 1941 nothing new occurred in the arsenal Italian army, which had not changed at all the sorting criteria of the armored units, their use and ability to move so as to arouse the apprehensions and doubts of Rommel and to bring about greater potential of fire and maneuver to somehow improve the organic and the possibilities of the standard Italian armored division.

Often it was considered that in the historical books on the 2nd World War, the Italian soldier is systematically ignored by friends or enemies; is a bitter realization that ignores the great sacrifices made by so many brave soldiers on the battlefield, but this statement is unjust in some partially explained by the overwhelming and decisive presence on the battlefield, the main protagonists and antagonists English, German, Russian and Americans with the decisive weight of their weapons, the number and quality of their means, the names and fame of their respective commanders, casting and to lay out for history the foundations for future evaluative analysis of the battles fought and the results achieved, excluding deliberately or unconsciously the presence - humble or otherwise - of Italian soldier unwitting victim of judgments are not always objective and serene.

The report prepared by the DAK noted the capture of 319 prisoners, including 237 combat tanks and Bren Carriers destroyed, 10 Crusader captured intact, 10 guns, 74 anti-tank, automatic weapons and ammunition (according to losses in English tanks were 29 "Cruiser" and 58 "Matilda"). The DAK lost 12 tanks between Mark II-III-IV, 3 anti-tank, 1 field gun, two self-propelled, 55 vehicles. The Italian-German prisoners were 570.

The participation of WDAF the "Battle Axe" manifested itself so multifaceted and according to the fundamental rules of use of the RAF in the Middle East, with a predominantly tactical component that formed the Western strength and point of pride Desert Air Force and how this will manifest itself more widely and perfected throughout the course of the conflict.

The units that Marshal Collishaw destined for the offensive in mid-June were the following:

1st Sqdn. SAAF with Hurricane II/B.
3rd Sqdn. RAAF with Hurricane II/A
73rd Sqdn. with Hurricane- "Kittyhawk"
250th Sqdn. with "Tomahawk"
274th Sqdn. with Hurricane- "Kittyhawk"
113th Sqdn. with Blenheim IV/F
14th Sqdn. with Blenheim IV/F
45th Sqdn. with Blenheim
55th Sqdn. with Blenheim
208th Sqdn. of aero-cooperation/photographic reconnaissance of Hurricane
806th Sqdn. FAA of "Swordfish"

These latter aircraft, now obsolete for 1st line combat use, were tasked with dropping flares by parachute on the targets assigned to the twin-engined "Wellington" bombers which, with the 37th and 148th Squadrons, operated from Malta and Egyptian airfields for night missions over Tripoli, Benghazi and the airfields of Cyrenaica.[84]

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The losses of WDAF were 33 fighters and fighter-bombers and 3 medium bombers. A heavy loss attributable according to Marshal Tedder to poor pilot training on new types of aircraft, Hurricane II/B and Curtiss P.40 and lack of experience in the fighting in the desert. Churchill himself criticized the tactical conduct of the WDAF found fragmented and dispersed in an irrational attempt to provide to the troops on the vast battlefield constant surveillance which proved impossible to achieve. Even the aero-cooperation, pride of WDAF, not provided the desired results even though it was for about the tactical reconnaissance that signaled the presence of the 21st Panzer marching towards Capuzzo, if the 7th Armored succeeded, albeit briefly, to escape encirclement with severe disappointment of Rommel. Despite the careful preparation of the battle plan, the large influx of reinforcements and supplies, the new armored vehicles fielded in greater numbers to the German tanks, the execution of the "Battle Axe" showed a certain stubbornness in applying in English orthodox form the attack patterns, while tracing the fortunate but worn-out tactical concepts of Gen. O'Connor and Gott, though made in circumstances and different ways to opponent contrast, available means, defensive criteria. This aspect from English also denounced the reluctance to abandon traditional methods of war in the desert with expounding the infantry and armored vehicles in the revolutionary tactical concepts of Rommel. The Axis aviation participation was massive, effective, decisive in the three-day battle in which the offensive operation lasted. On the 15th, aerial formations bombing more locations of Tobruk curbing some of the enemy activities reported air observation and make him desist from undertaking offensive actions; at the same time were bombarded the British logistics centers between Sidi Barrani and Aarsa Matruk. On the day of the British attack, formations of Stukas and fighter-bombers escorted by fighters attacked the enemy mechanized columns in several waves, setting fire to and destroying vehicles and tanks, and shooting down 11 British aircraft in combat. A formation of Italian and German Ju.87 escorted by 16 G.50 of the 2nd Group CT and the largest share of Bf.109 of JG.27, attacking enemy armored vehicles in the Sollum area vainly opposed higher up the Hurricanes of the 33rd Sqdn. Brilliant was also the intervention of 5 CR.42 B.A. under the command of Capt. Molinari hitting accurately enemy tanks in the area of Sidi Omar, and using the trampoline airfield of Sidi Omthamam returned several times to the attack.

Contributed to terrestrial operations also German bombers located in Crete and Greece, which several times hit Egypt's logistics centers.

The next day - 16 June - the attacks were repeated with greater intensity with the killing of another 14 enemy planes and finally the 17th and the last British rearguard fell back over the Egyptian border under the Axis attacks another 6 British planes were destroyed in air combat and by AA artillery. On the same day other bombers hammered in proportion Tobruk and Marsa Matruk without suffering any loss. Of note the unusual service provided by a dozen Bf.110 carrying emergency special armor-piercing ammo for Panzer Mark IV into the Bardia area escorted by Italian G.50.

On June 18, the Commander Superior ASI dutifully praised in an agenda issued after its victorious battle aviation: "... the master of the sky of the battle, which bombed and strafed the crowded conditions facing opponents in fighting the enemy fighter with the loss of 20 aircraft." A flattering result for aviation which was much of the credit for the successful conclusion of “Battle Axe”.

The new British failure cost the removal of Gen Wavell replaced by Gen. Claude Auchinleck, the replacement of Air Marshall Tedder with peer Coningham and other news in lesser degrees of the hierarchy Q.G. Middle East. Almost in the same period they occurred some changes at the top of the High Command Armed Forces of the A.S.I. with the replacement of General Italo Gariboldi by designated Army Gen. Hector Bastico coming from the Italian Aegean possessions, in whose place was assigned Fleet Admiral Inigo Campioni.

Having been defeated twice on the Egyptian border between May and June, the British in the Middle East had no other alternative, in the second half of 1941, than to strengthen and maintain possession of Tobruk at all costs and to further deepen the "thorn" stuck in the side of the Italian-German deployment in Marmaris.[85]

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The conquest of the fortress of Tobruk was repeatedly the subject of discussions and evaluations at the Axis commands and was also included in an in-depth study done by General Mario Roatta –Chief of the Army GS - which included the conquest of Tobruk in two phases distinct and the use of 4 armored divisions (2 Italian and 2 German) and five infantry divisions reinforced by a motorized units - all Italian - study to achieve with the air support that would see the participation of 19 Sqd. fighters, 16 bombers, 8 divers, a torpedo, 2 strategic reconnaissance, a fighter-bomber. Subsequently, after the elimination of Tobruk, it was possible to arrange with the forces available a new offensive against Egypt using 6-7 armored and 7-8 motorized divisions (13 to 15 Axis mechanized G.U.).

However, priority was recognized the need to strengthen aviation and the 5th Air Fleet Command, questioned the way, thought it could accept and accommodate conveniently at least another 2 fighter and 6 bombers Groups, making the most of infrastructure and materials available in Libya.

But the main problem to make any offensive initiative, still remained to secure the necessities of life, food and to combat new planned motorized-armored units though more and more fatally shrinking the collateral margin that the Navy was able to secure in the current situation of supplies with North Africa to the largest increase in consumption and particularly the Axis fuel needs.

To ensure supplies and reinforcements to the extent desired, it was therefore necessary to permanently eliminate the danger of Malta, but to get this assumption was necessary to neutralize it once and for all with a renewed air offensive, using new Italian-German air units, to create basic predispositions needed for the occupation of Malta by land or air landing (or both options combined), to increase the convoys, landed in Tripoli, Benghazi, Derna, Tobruk men and materials, complete the units assigned to the offensive against Egypt, creating the necessary combat equipment, to ensure continuity of supplies for at least three months at full speed and at most of the workforce, establish strategic reserves. But to achieve these conditions were calculated by Superesercito and the Supreme Command not a short time ranging from 18 to 24 months.

The existing reality on the spot and the projects developed in Italy were far and verses from the most optimistic forecasts. Italy 1941 possessed one battle worthy and modest armored division (Ariete), another (Centauro) under technical transformation and completion, a third (Littorio) on paper and in anticipation of the 1942 program of the S.C.. Existing motorized divisions were only two (Trento and Trieste) and were among other incomplete in organic; 3 rapid divisions were not usable for by structured constitution and in North Africa, those semi-motorized type A.S. to actual reduced, they did not represent more than a thin euphemism of military language to say something that did not really exist in Italian law except, perhaps, the only the divisional artillery Regiment, while using intervention material passed, had towed instead transported.

But outside of those objective considerations, it will be enough to quote the report to Stamage prepared by Gen. Bastico -new Commander Superior ASI -which put in starkly revealed weakness of the Italian divisions and their inadequate mobility (8,500 vehicles for operational services and existing in Libya between efficient logistics or revision assigned to the command needs and seven divisions – author's note).

These infantry units accounted for Axis commands a significant impediment in offensive operations, as it were of little use in war of movement and maneuvering could have some weight in just static and position operations. In the negative assumption but predictable withdraw, were fatally destined to annihilation as on several occasions it invariably occurred in the three British offensives implemented between 1940 and 1942.

The moral and psychological level of which showed affection the Italian soldier was even more worrying, as it directly related to the level of technology possessed with depressing result that the most visible aspects, flattering and striking of the war operations were reserved for the German's DAK were positive in the historical profile of the obtained victories, charged instead with great ease and nonchalance from DAK on Italian, though the effects were negative.[86]

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Deficient armament and equipment, poor mobility and inadequate maneuverability were the favorite themes of German complaints against the Italian soldiers, unwitting victims of such a difficult and precarious situation which did not present acceptable solutions except in certain particular conditions of positive evolution of the war operations. But as mentioned at the beginning, it was possible to overcome these deficiencies if the expansion program and strengthening of the Italian Armed Forces in N.A. It should not be difficult and almost unworkable, as indeed appeared unlikely an increase in staff of DAK in 1941 to compensate for this Italian shortcoming, since the Russian campaign was absorbing resources and energy in measuring progressive gradually for a number of unforeseen operational difficulties.

In the defensive plans of Stamage it was expected to rationally use the infantry G. U. and assuming a English general offensive, the abandonment of the advanced positions in Marmarica with establishing a manned defense line alignment Ain el Gazala -Bir Tengeder, supplemented later by a second line of defense Derna-Mechili - static positions those that substantially agree with the views of the OWK, the Superior Command ASI and the DAK, designed specifically with regard to the application capabilities and possibilities of the Italian infantry.

In August to balance and offset some of the operational aspect, maneuvering and practical constituted by the presence of efficient and well-armed DAK, the High Command ASI, in agreement with the Stamage, arranged to form the C.A.M. (Corpo d'Armata di Manovra) composed with the Ariete and the two Motorized divisions "Trento" and "Trieste" (coming from Italy) which was placed under the command of Gen. Gastone Gambara with the intent of having available efficient completely Italian tool to use oppose to the DAK and reduce in part its psychological importance. On August 15 was also formed the- Armored Command Group Africa (Panzer Gruppe Afrika) placed under the orders of Gen. Erwin Rommel and Gen. Alfred Gause Chief of Staff, including the German and Italian troops - armored and infantry - located in Marmarica (Tobruk and Sollum/Halfaya) and simultaneously was formed the Italian Military Command Cyrenaica including all the Italian troops in the area.

In Panzer Gruppe Afrika addition to the 15th and 21st Pz. Div. and a minor Germanic units, there was part of the XXI Corps (Gen. Enea Navarrini), the Inf. Divs. Savona, Brescia, Pavia, Bololgna and technical units while the CAM was placed under the direct employment dependencies of Gen. Bastico and then free from possible interventions of Rommel.

From the union of the autonomous and non-divisional German loose units, a Z.b.V. (For tropical special purpose) then transformed into the 90th Leichtemotorisiert Division that led to the 3rd G.U. of the DAK under whose command was left by Rommel, the PZ. Gruppe Afrika, had been designated Gen. Ludwig Crüwel. They were appointed their respective Liaison Officers (Gen. Calvi di Bergolo) for DAK and Lt. Col. Heggenreiner at the High Command ASI.

The constitution of the CAM aimed to achieve in the Supercomando ASI intentions a dual purpose: to create at the High Command ASI an intervention force and a mobile reserve essentially Italian destined for offensive purposes but especially the protection of Italian foot born divisions of infantry in hypothesis of a withdraw, and at the same time possess and have an effective operational tool against the ambitions of Rommel, and balance and restrict if necessary, his uncontrollable initiatives.

Between August and mid-November the two battle fronts between Marmarica and the Egyptian border remained essentially static except for a few minor adjustments made to Tobruk and an offensive reconnaissance forces beyond the Egyptian border.

But something was moving in the Axis field to eliminate Tobruk once and for all, and English Field to permanently free the besieged garrison of the fortress now for over 7 months.

On the eve of the English autumn offensive implemented with Operation "Crusader", the Axis losses amounted to about 12,000 men among the dead, wounded, missing. The Italian blood contribution to the reconquest of Cyrenaica and the subsequent defensive battles had been 1,210 dead, 4,250 wounded, 3,850 missing in large part to be considered prisoners. 540 killed, 1,660 wounded, 700 missing were the losses of the Germans.[87]

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These are figures that should give pause to thought to the superficial and hasty detractors of the Italian soldier who, despite fighting with all the limitations and deficiencies of his deficient armament, fought and died with humility, in silence, often ignored or misunderstood in his sacrifices offered with dignity and modesty. The figures in their cold eloquence say much more than many historical hypocritical and convenient versions.

CHANGES IN THE 5th AERIAL FLEET

The hasty and disharmonious reconstitution that the 5th Air Fleet had endure to overcome the serious crisis of the winter-spring 1941, may be considered to partially overcome the following summer in the reorganization of units, services, technical-logistical - health infrastructure that the Libyan aeronautics needed, suffered still under the executive aspect of the difficulties due to the lack of command authorities of the area and related dependent services, being the execution of all operational orders and logistic and administrative same time, to tactical command of the GUA operating at the time in Libya: the "Rex" Air Division and the "Pegasus" Air Division existing since the beginning of the war.

To these dysfunctions was added the great spacing distance between the Tripolitania Fleet Command and that the so-called "advanced units", represented in the Cyrenaica of the “Pegasus” Air Div. Command, which made it even more difficult the execution of the normal working process.

To overcome these difficulties the GS/RA on the proposal of the 5th Air Fleet Command of the Air Force approved the reorganization of Italian N.A. and this gave rise quickly to the new restructuring of the commands as of 9 May 1941 was as follows:

Command 5th Air Fleet -Tripoli (Advanced Tactical Command in Apollonia);
Command Aeronautical Sector West -Tripoli (territory west of the 21st meridian);
Command Aeronautical Sector East -Derna (territory east of the 21st meridian);
Command Aeronautical Sector Central - Benghazi (territory between 19th and 21st meridian).

Directorates of Services, Technical, Commissioner, State Property, Telecommunications, Health distributed proportionally in the three sectors and divided as follows:

Departments (Offices/Units): Air Army, Transportation, Relief, APC.

Airports, Warehouses/workshops, Weather, Landings/embarkation, Recruits turnout center, P.T. (Military Post), Cipher, Secretary, Personnel, connection CAT, Operations/Sorting, Cartographic, Personal/discipline, CC.RR Command/RA of Libya.

Offices: Materials services/airports, State Property, Commissioner, Telecommunications/Radio links, - RT Center/Sector Command, Health, Spiritual Care, Troop, Transport Unit.

Airports equipped. n. 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 709, 718, 755, 762, 763, 758, 759, 774, K2, E2, E3, T4, K1, corresponding to as many locations in the code.

Magazines/Depots
211th Magazine MSA –Tripoli
212th Magazine MSA -Benghazi
57th Dep. fuel –Tripoli
58th Dep. fuel –Benghazi
111th Dep. Ammunition -Bir Sbear
112th Dep. ammunition – Benghazi
163rd Dep. -Mellaha vehicles
161st Dep. - Benghazi vehicles
Main stock auto spare parts -Tripoli vehicles Workshop G. R. - Bu Meliana
Workshop revision - Tripoli Aviation engines
SRAM –Mellaha
SRAM -Castel Benito
Ala Littoria Aviation Workshop -Castel Benito
SIAI –Zavia
Sqd. Rev. aviation engines –Tripoli
Off. reviewing tools -Mellaha
SRAM –Berka
SRER –Mellaha
177th Dep. State Property –Tripoli
178th Dep. State Property – Benghazi
228th Mag. V.E. –Tripoli
238th Mag. barracks –Tripoli
Mag. aviation engines – Benghazi
Mag. food – Benghazi
Dep. telecommunications-Tripoli
Dep. telecommunications- Benghazi

Aeronautics Sector West (Cmdr. Gen. D.A. Raoul da Barberino)
Chief SM: Col. Alfredo Martire
Office Op. Add.to and Ord.to: Lt. Col. Bordin, Lt. Col. Colacicchi
Office Chart: Lt. RE Oss. E. Spadaccino
Office. Pers. Discipline: Lt. Col. A. Monteleone
Office. Health: Maj. CSA E. Cuzzucrea
CC.RR. Command: Lt. M. Palumbo
Rep. Command: Capt. F. Cucchiari[88]

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19th Meridian -Sahara Libyan (only administratively)

Dependent units
175th Sqd. RST
174th Sqd. RST
209th Sqd. B.A. T.
151st Sqd. C.T.
376th Sqd. Aut. C.T.
ASI Transportation Group
244th Sqd. T.
614th Sqd. S.
12th Sqd. APC
104th Sqd. APC
Motorized group of maneuver-Mellaha
Dep. fuel –Misurata
Dep. ammunition -Misurata
Off. Rep. vehicles -Castelverde
Off. Rep. vehicles -Misurata
S.R.A. –Sirte
Motor vehicle Rep unit., -Zliten
15th Group O.A. (Sqd. 32nd / 125th) –Zuara
67th Group O.A. (Sqd. 129th) –Mellaha
145th Sqd. R.M. -Tripoli / Caramanli
Saharan Aviation unit

Central sector (Capt Col. Pilot. F. Orlando, then Gen. Venceslao D 'Aurelio)
Chief SM: Lt. Col. A. Ragnelli
Secretariat: Lt. RE Oss. V. Oliva
Office Op.ni Add.to: Capt. F. Berretta
Office Cartographic: Lt: RS A. Di Prima
Office Materials/Airports: Lt. Col. A. Reali
Office radio links: Lt. GARAT E. Agazzi
Office State Property: Capt. GARI M. Zannini
Commissioner Office: Maj. R.C.V. Vacri
Office Health: Cap. CSA F. Di Bene
CC.RR . Command: Lt. B. Torri
Dependent units
19th Sqd. RST
18th Aut Group. C.T. (Sqd. 85th / 95th)
374th Sqd. C.T.
149th ASI Transportation Group
Sec. 244th Sqd. T.
Sec. 614th Sqd. S.
16th Sqd. APC
Motorized group of maneuver –Berka
Off. Rep. vehicles -Berka
recruits turnout Center -Berka
Office embarkation / disembarkation –Benghazi
Sec. 15th Sqd. O.A
196th Sqd. R.M.
Saharan Aviation unit

East sector (Cmdr. Gen. D.A. Attilio Matricardi, then Gen. Ferdinand Raffaelli)
Chief SM: Lt. Col. E. Gilardoni
Control Office: Capt. F. Dadone
Office Cipher: Lt. RS N. Vivaidi
Operations office: Capt. G. Fonsili
Cartographic Office: Lt. C. Antonini
Office Personnel: Capt. G. Bignotti
Office Supplies/Airports: Capt. M. Olivo
Office State Property: Lt. C. Scipioni
Office Commissioner: Lt. T. Anselmi
Telecommunications Office: Sub. Lt. S. Quintavalle
Connection Office CAT: Maj. A. Casati, Maj. F. Brioschi, Sub. Lt. K. Merkel
CC.RR Command: Lt. A. Pasquini
Weather Center: Lt. S. Rossi
Department Command: Capt. E. Pasqualy

Dependent units
8th Stormo B.T.
98th Group Aut. B.T.
239th Sqd. B.a.T.
279th Sqd. AS
83rd Sqd. B.A. (18th Gr. Aut. C.T.)
Sec. 19th Sqd. RST
20th Group Aut. C.T.
Dep. ammunition -Umm er Rzem
Vehicles workshop Rip.ni–Derna
SRAM unit –Derna
28th/29th State Property labor Unit
Sec. Lisa Sqd. O.A.

5th Air Fleet Command

workforce sorting
Commander Gen. S.A. Mario Ajmone Cat
Chief of SM: Gen. B.A. Fernando Silvestri
flight Aide: Capt. Mario Jacopini
Secretariat: Capt. RS E. Fiore
Cipher office: Capt. RS A. Pedron
Chief SM Department: Lt. Col. Carlo Bertolini
Links Official Royal Navy: C. F. Carlo Rossi
Operations / Information Office: Maj. Manlio Maravigna, Capt. R. Folinea, G. Macorig, G. Faccioli
Office Add.to: Lt. Col. Ugo Campanelli
Photo Cartographic Office: Capt. RE Oss. Mario Terzagli[89]

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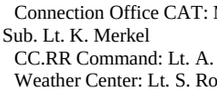

5th Air Fleet Flight Department: Capt. G. Nicolis di Robilant
Personnel Department: Lt. Col. Armando Rosticcia
Discipline Office: Lt. Col. Antonio Fieramonti
Sec. awards / rewards: Maj. Fernando Tacchi
CC.RR command: Capt. N. Santin
Command Department: Capt. RS M. Albano

Stewardship [Quatermaster]
Chief GS services: Col. Franco Cavallarin (later Col. Donatello Gabrielli)
airports material: Col. F. Fresia
Sec. Technique: Lt. Col. GARI E. Garroni
Sec. State Property: Lt. Col. GARI M. Luccio
Sec. Commissioner: Col. RC F. Boricelli
Sec. Telecommunications/Weather: Lt. Col. G. Zuccoli
radio links Office: Capt. F. Andrower
Weather Office: Capt. GARI S. Di Marco
Health office: CSA Col. G. Del Vasto

The new organization assumed by the reconstituted 5th Air Fleet in a widespread manner all service branches and freed the tactical commands of tasks that were not always able to fulfill their structure and institutional tasks. Specifically the East sector had to provide for the performance of operational tasks in cooperation with the CAT: Recon, offensive missions, escort, surveillance, the tactical support in respect of Italian troops and the DAK.

The Central Sector was responsible for the air defense of Cyrenaica and in particular of Benghazi (port/airport), was to ensure the protection of convoys, antisubmarine surveillance and south of Jebel to the main oasis: Gialo, Augila, Marada, Zeltan. Finally it had to contribute, if necessary, to operations in Marmarica.

The Western Sector was to ensure the protection of Tripoli, monitor access to routes of naval convoys -from and Italy -and perform anti-submarine missions, control the coasts until the Sirtica, check out the great caravan oasis and southern Tripoli: Hon, Bir el Gaf, Zuila, Ubari, Murzuk, El Gatrun on which since time looming threat of infiltration by Chad of de Gaullist elements.

From this overall picture emerges with the realization of the tasks entrusted to the 5th Air Fleet of Libya, the vastness of the territory, the variety of services, the responsibility at the highest level to the commands of the R.A., the R.N., and the DAK. The split of the available air force was needed to ensure commitments and services, but at the same time decreased the size of the units assigned to the East Sector, certainly the most severe and demanding.

Quite different was instead the position of the Fl.Fu. Afrika since despite having units and aircraft a number lower than the Italians, could concentrate all the means available for tactical support, providing to Gen. Rommel a very important and efficient support.

One squadron of Bf.110 fighter had been detached to Derna for various tasks, having to provide air escort to convoys from Greece and Crete, which repeatedly had been attacked off the coast of Cyrenaica by Beaufighter and Blenheim with the loss of some Ju.52.

Not infrequently the Italian-German air collaboration took place unilaterally, given the reluctance of Gen Frohlich to grant his aircraft to escort missions or other service tasks, while almost always getting them from the Italian Air Force, as well as demand, aircraft swooping and fighter escort to perform offensive missions particularly, of Tobruk. It also noted a duality of concepts, orders, transactions with the result of creating dysfunctions, wasteful, unnecessary movement of units. All this was the result of promiscuous situation in Libya where the tactical command of the German and Italian-mechanized troops was entrusted to Rommel who was using in his judgment and in a completely independent units of the Fl.Fu. Afrika, he sought and was granted by the High Command ASI aid or the participation of the Italian air units and the 5th Air Fleet, subject to operational dependency of the Armed Forces Command Libya could do was adhere to the higher orders.

Slowly it was establishing with these progressive yielding, the gradual prevalence of authority by the Germans that was transforming the initial collaboration of arms carried by organic means and numerically lower than the Italians, with a presence that was to constitute legally only as "guests allied units on the Italian territory," in a different context, of command, of authority, the decisions imposed and accepted at all levels.[90]

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A dangerous process of psychological evolution in favour of the Germans in the Mediterranean was beginning, which would soon distort and overturn the political concept of the "Theatre of war in the Italian zone of influence" on which Italian strategy had been based since the beginning of the war.

* * *

In anticipation of a decisive attack on Tobruk expected in November and thoroughly developed by Rommel, Superaereo arranged to strengthen the 5th Air Fleet transferred to Libya new units including the 153rd Group C.T. with MC.200, the 209th Sqd. Dive Bombers with Ju.87, 13th Stormo BT with BR.20, the 3rd Group C.T. with CR.42, the 160th Group C.T. with CR.42, the 12th Group C.T. with G.50 that would respectively alternate with recent Fighters Groups 118th, 155th and 2nd. For still in Libya units were catered for replenishing the line amenities 10 new Ju.87/R2, 14 CR.42, 25 G.50 with a supply of about 200 Fiat A-74R.C38, Jumo 211, and Alfa 126 engines.

Returned home for rest, recovery and assignment of new types of fighters, the 2nd Group C.T. (would receive the new Re.2001 aircraft), the 18th which would be passed the MC.200 together with the 155th. With the arrival of new units the fighter component would be increased to 70% of the workforce of the 1st line load in the 5th Air Fleet rising to about 300 airplanes between CR.42, G.50, and MC.200 and corresponded proportionately in measurement of 1:4.5 when it came to the fighter aircraft of Fl.Fu. Afrika and 1:2.3 for the numerical magnitude of single or twin-engined RAF fighters deployed and identified on LG. Western Desert. A force not quantitatively negligible although short of expectations in terms of quality.

In addition to strengthening the flight line would be sent to Libya between 3000 and airmen specialists, parts materials, equipment, equipment, 500 vehicles of all types to meet the needs of the units and commands.

It was to reinstate part of the precious cargo stowed on board the steamship "Birmania" was lost along with the ship "Città di Bari" in the port of Tripoli, the loss he had caused delays and difficulties in the established improvement program.

It was also reinforced the second-line logistics operations with the transformation of 103rd Sqd. APC with SM.81 intended for dual purpose desert and sea exploration, the 244th Sqd. T. that, equally with SM.81, was assigned to the tasks of terrestrial and maritime surveillance for the desert and supervision of integrated coastal convoys of O.A. squadrons 32nd, 125th, 129th with twin-engine Ca.311 also used as anti-submarine duties. A measure that will prove highly appropriate to ensure the approach of naval convoys carrying precious supplies for the Axis. On August 8 was held at Cyrene a service conference present Gen. Cavallero, Bastico, Rommel, Rin Telen military -person in Rome -and other officials Supercomando ASI and of DAK. The opportunity to become a further transformation of commands and expertise.

Rommel was given command of all the Italian and German troops to the east of the meridian of Ain el Gazala and on August 15 was made up of the Panzer Gruppe Afrika (DAK and XXI Corps d'Army (15th, 21st Pz. Div., Inf. Divs. Savona, Bologna, Pavia, Brescia)).

The Germanic G.S. link to the High Command ASI turned into command of the P.G.A. with Gen. Gause Chief of Staff and thus Germany acquired even greater prominence and importance in Libya, as it was in the hidden aspirations OKW realized shrewdly by General Rommel.

The P.G Afrika had in turn a Italian GS Connection (Gen. Calvi di Bergolo) for relations with Supercomando ASI, and an GS in connection with the DAK (Col. Lovera) for relations with the Italian units included in the P.G.A.

The same month, following agreements between Gen. Ritter von Pohl of the Italuft and Gen. Pricolo, the problem of coordinating the offensive air operations Italian-German aviation on the Libyan-Egyptian front, it was devolved to the responsibility of Fl.Fu. Afrika and thus the commander of Panzer Gruppe Afrika also had at his disposal the tactical component and fighters of the R.A. deployed in the eastern sector.

Other agreements were made for tactical reconnaissance and strategic exploration in the division into sectors of the Egyptian theater of operations. Simultaneously increased surveillance at sea was intensified offensive action on preventive sectors to deter adversaries and damage as much as possible the enemy's attack program, although the English-proven system to use only the LG. as advanced springboard airfields greatly reduced the chances of inflict hard blows to the enemy flying material.[91]

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Some energetic but logical positions taken by the commander of the 5th Air Fleet - General Mario Ajmone Cat - in the face of Rommel's continuous requests to use the Italian air units indiscriminately for operational needs without harmonizing efforts and uses in a more rational vision of employment, created differences of opinion between the High Command of the Armed Forces of the ASI - always eager to comply with the requests of the German General - and the Command of the 5th Air Fleet, squeezed between the operational dependence attributed by law to the higher land command and the hierarchical and direct one of the Royal Air Force General Staff, which, mindful of the senseless use of the 5th Air Fleet in the previous period, was pushing for a more logical and congenial policy of intervention. There were some heated polemics between Rommel and General Ajmone Cat that are worth knowing about.

The intrusiveness of Gen. Rommel bordering often in not strictly dependent fields from its control functions, the height reached in the first week of September in a letter to the Commander of the 5th Air Fleet, which accused the Italian commands not adequately protecting the incoming naval convoys from Italy, suggesting, among other things, the application of protective measures, and that its capabilities were outside the viewing of the air war and the 5th Air Fleet command applied consistently for some time rationally and significantly more than those recommended by the German general.

Suffice it to say that in the course of a single month - 10 August - 11 September - to protect 45 convoys with air escort had been used 640 aircraft (15 on average per convoy) and then in greater numbers than indicated by Rommel; the supervisory cruises on ports and approach routes had seen the use of another 1,046 aircraft operating at distances far greater than the 100 km that Rommel indicated in his memo.

In the period referred aviation of Libya for the only direct or indirect protection of convoys to and from Italy, had employed 1,800 aircraft of all types: bombers, reconnaissance, fighter.

Out of 13 vessels lost in that period, only 5 had been sunk in the period of aerial surveillance, but in war you must take into account -the imponderable circumstances that regulate and restrict air activity: weather conditions, poor visibility, intermittent clouds, surprise, use of technological equipment; a number of elements that probably a commander of armored troops could not always know and analyze the fullest extent.

The rejection of Gen. Ajmone Cat to go to the DAK Q.G. - to discuss the problem with Rommel, refusal motivated by the importance of the problem to be addressed in an upper level and sharpened even more than the Italian-German and personal relationships with Rommel.

On this occasion, stressed on several occasions by the Chief of the GSG sensitized by reports received in this regard from Libya, Mussolini suggested to the Chief of Staff/RA - Gen. Pricolo - to replace the commander of the 5th Air Fleet- who on November 5 was replaced in command by Gen. S.A. Vittorio Marchesi.

The disagreements and divergent views between Rommel and Gen. Ajmone Cat, were also reflected at a higher level, and it was necessary to settle the issue in a conversation that took place between Gen. Pricolo and Reich Marshal Goering of which took place in Rominten on October 2, also for dealing with the major problem of transport to North Africa -word from time for any future offensive operation in N.A. -- and establish new and more effective working relationships between the two air forces in the Mediterranean.

Conversations do not produce specific effects to the general aims of the problem, because the Germans did not provide new information that had not already been taken earlier, the Italian command, starting with the Supreme Command to finish with Supermarina and Superaereo.

The most important aspect of the problem concerned as always neutralization of Malta nerve center and strategic -point of offensive conduct English - measures to facilitate transport, making better use - the Libyan ports, the cargo distribution for Libya reserving the transport of materials the steamers, that personnel with fast warships (DD. and CL) and aircraft.

Gen. Pricolo pointed out the objective Italian difficulties due to lack of adequate number of transport and insufficient availability of fuel aircraft and anticipated Goering to establish a foothold in Lampedusa to improve air traffic control in the Sicilian Channel.

It is ever more insistently overlooked the possibility of a German-Italian joint action to occupy Malta and finally rid the Central Mediterranean from this grave and constant danger.[92]

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Best news had for more effective tactical collaboration between the two air forces and to improve the availability and the air sighting service through the provision of German radar (Funkmess Gerate).

Returning home, Gen. Ajmone was appointed to the General Command of R.A. Schools, who take this assignment with commitment and high sense of responsibility until the armistice of September 1943.

But to aggravate the aeronautical situation in Libya, where continued to remain in Supercomando the mindset of use of 1940, with requests for intervention and operational suggestions that went beyond the field of terrestrial command responsibility, it subsisted and acted negatively the plethora of commands, skills and checks that existing systems assigned to the Army, the Navy, the Ministry of Italian Africa, the High command Armed Forces ASI and deserves to know to better understand difficulties was forced to operate the 5th Air Fleet Command harnessed by many different commands.

The Air Force for the Army depended on the High Command of ASI; the Colonial Aviation Garrison depended to Supercomando and the G.U. of commands Army of individual operating segments; Aviation for the Navy depended to Supercomando ASI and the Navy Command of Libya, the Aviation Saharan Africa was employed by the Supercomando ASI and the command of the Sahara sector.

But everyone without distinction these Aerial commands, were headed for technical and logistical reasons, by the 5th Air Fleet Command, where they received from staff reintegrate, assistance, materials, services and administrative, bureaucratic, health.[93]

The Chief of Staff / RA January Francesco Pricolo arrives in N.A. to implement exchange of commands between Gen. Aimone Cat and Gen Alberto Marchesi (right) new head of the 5th Air Fleet.

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Italian airmen downloading in Derna barrels of gasoline / aviation from a Ju 52 arriving from Crete. The serious crisis of supplies caused by the sinking of ships advised sending with transport aircraft the needs to fight.

At the same time, the 5th Air Squadron had to provide for the satisfaction of the service requests of the Navy and the Exercise Air Force to integrate the departments of these commands, unable to satisfy the multiplicity of requests; equally comply with the requests of the CAT and the DAK) ensure the air connection services of Libya and provide for many other tasks.

A series of severe services which was not always possible to meet the flight material failure, subjective, quality and quantity of available aircraft. But despite these heavy duty and multiple responsibilities, the 5th Air Fleet did not have at the Supercomando ASI, a sole representative of the Air Force of Libyan.

The war activity was manifested by bombing at altitude on the sectors between Marsa Matruk and Sollum, with day and night missions on LG. of Sanyet el Qasaba, Maaten Baqqush, Gerawla, Fuka, Abar Nimeir, Bir Abu Smeyt, Abu Haggag; these repeated missions in staggered and irregular hours in the hope of finding enemy formations in technical stop from the sectors of Alexandria and the Suez Canal.

But compared to the number of actions performed, the results were below the hopes, also for lack of bomber aircraft able to remain with their autonomy and for a long time on the designated targets.

On two occasions it was fortunate, however, to can engage the adversary and inflict considerable losses.

On September 3, 27 Fiat G.50 of the 20th Group C.T. led by Lt. Col. Bonzano and divided into two bands - one for attack and the other protection those attacking LG.05 (SE of Sidi Barrani) on which were stranded unwary Hurricane fighter aircraft and motor vehicles, strafing long and burning vehicles, tankers, 12 fighters, destroying ammunition and fuel dumps.

A few minutes later called by radio, came in dribs and drabs and many Hurricane and Tomahawk (Curtiss P.40) a violent fighting was lit on the Sidi Barrani sky with losses on both sides. S.M. Baldacci was shot down, two G.50 were badly damaged and forced the pilots to land without wheels on the airfield of Sidi Barrani were captured. Another Fiat had more or less serious damage but managed to return to Marmarica knocking down in the sky of the area a cruising Hurricane.

The WDAF had many aircraft severely damaged, a P.40 lost in landing, and according to the British information, did not satisfy the slaughter or destruction of 12 aircraft reported by the Italian command.

Italian airmen unload drums of aviation gasoline from a Ju. 52 arriving from Crete in Derna. The serious supply crisis caused by the sinking of ships prompted the dispatch of combat supplies by transport aircraft.

The mission had allowed, however, to hit at least once in the heap, to attract the enemy and engage him; that the Fleet command judged positive to retry without fail.

On September 7, 22 MC.200 of the 153rd Group C.T. and 15 G.50 of 155th repeated the attack on LG.05 and 02/03 of Sidi Barrani bearing down early and surprising Hurricane and P .40 fighters on the ground, 5 of which were set on fire and damaged others. The anti-aircraft defense was very violent, and for the first time were used for a barrier, steel cables launched by rockets, two of them caught in the wings of a G.50 were sent to Gambut as a trophy.

The attack mission was scheduled on the previous day but in the night on 5 twin-engine Wellington had bombed the Gambut landing field also dropped on the ground 4 point nails that in the morning they did massacre of 40 tires between MC. 200 and G.50 coming from Derna for action.[94]

Arriving in N.A. the 20th Group CT autonomous. (Lt. Col. M Bonzano) with his G. 50 fresh from the CAI - A salute from the fellow pilots of the 351st Sqd who are about to take off for a mission.

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Gen. BA V.D'Aurelio visiting the east area to talk with the unit commanders on a Marmarica airport. In 1941, the 5th Air Fleet was restructured and improved in its technical and logistical organization.

An AB.41 armored car of the CAM advances through the shooting of British artillery. The CAM (Gen. G. Gambara) was established to provide the ASI supercomando a organization similar to DAK.

A breather of serenity for Italian soldiers of Libya cheered by the OND artists - Aviators, infantry, artillery and engineer are granted a moment of carefree joy.

It took the whole day to restore the efficiency of the two units.

In the afternoon also German planes attacked the airfields at Barrani torching a Hurricane and damaging another 6. The budget of 7 September 1941 for the WDAF was 22 fighter lost or badly damaged.

On September 14, Gen. Rommel, commander in charge of the German-Italian armored forces of the eastern sector, planned and, effecting the deep penetration into enemy territory to test its consistency, assess their effects and draw appropriate inferences.

The advance took place without any particular desire on the part of the English resistance, because the advanced troops of the 8th Army quickly retreated without engaging leaving solely to the WDAF the task of attacking thoroughly the Italian-German columns now operating entirely in Egyptian territory.

For such exploratory push, Advanced Tactical Command Rommel had logically sought and obtained the aviation co-operation and were awarded 45 Ju.87 of Fl.Fu. Afrika from the St. G.1 and 2 wings reinforced by 12 Italian Stukas of the 209th Sqd. B.A. T. (Capt. Marco Romanese) that moved from Derna to the landing field of Gars el Arid (160 km east of Tobruk). Units of Italian-German fighters would have escorted the Stukas in their assigned missions.

On the afternoon of September 13 it was held at Gambut - 20 km north of Gars el Arid - a meeting of all the Italian and German pilots involved in the operation, in which he was shown the plan of Rommel and designated specifically targets to attack: St. G.2, Dar el Hamra; St. G.1, Alam El Safa; 209th Sqd., Bir Habata.

To facilitate the execution of his pilot's mission, Capt. Romanese would remain in Gambut taking off along with the Germans Ju.87 of St. G.2 -based on the same field -and he would meet in flight at head of his squadron when he flew over the German education Gars el Arid to "join" into a single column of Stukas of St.G. 1 and the Italians taking off from that field.

Commander of the Italian aircraft that were to take off from El Arid was Lt. Crivellini designated by Capt. Romanese.

Unfortunately the morning of the 14th occurred some unexpected in the execution of the flight technique that negatively altered what had been prepared.[95]

A SM. 82 stopped at the edge of an oasis guarded by Italian soldiers in the Sahara. The transport aircraft proved irreplaceable and valuable to ensure continuity and efficiency in the 5th Air Fleet.

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A significant message written by an unknown Italian aviator affixed to a Boston twin-engined of WDAF found in a Landing Ground of Marmarica A telling sign of the US war supplies

Enter into service in N.A. the first truck mounted batteries with Ansaldo 90/53 A/A cannons with an excellent gun that proved particularly effective in the operations in the desert.

The bus carrying the Italian pilots, which had left Gambut at dawn to reach Gars el Arid, ran into a thick blanket of fog, lost its bearings and precious time and when it reached the departure field the take-offs of the Germans of the St. G.1 had already begun, albeit with obvious difficulties due to the poor visibility which caused a collision between two Stukas; the formation of the St. G.2 coming from Gambut, to which Capt. Romanese was attached, flew over el Arid, gradually picked up the Ju.87s of the St. G.1 orbiting at high altitude and continued compactly towards the east, leaving the commander of the 209th isolated, who, after having circled for a long time above the field without seeing his pilots, had no other alternative than to quickly reach the German formation whose commander - Maj. Sorge - had not considered it appropriate to circle further over Gars el Arid and wait for the Italians so as not to waste time.

At 06:50 the Ju.87s of the 209th finally managed to take off loaded with bombs and fuel- and without external auxiliary fuel tanks removed for a greater payload.

One Ju.87 fell soon after to engine trouble and the rest of the formation continued on another route to the designated targets, attacked concentrations of enemy vehicles in Bir Habata until such time as finishing the fuel, the Ju.87 were forced on the way back and without precise references to land in enemy territory, in isolation and in distant points of each other, having taken the wrong route.

The Stukas were seriously damaged when landing because of the rugged terrain; one was set on fire by the crew, one remained intact was captured by the British, 4 were later recovered with 5 men crew remained in the neighborhood, 4 reported irreparable damage.

The search was lasting 14 to 22 September and was attended by G.50s of the 20th and 155th Group CT, the Ro.37s of the 129th Sqd. O.A., SM.79s of the 19th Sqd., MC.200 of the 372nd Sqd., The two surviving Ju.87 of the 209th Sqd. with Sub. Lt. Ragonese and the commander, Italian and German aircraft logistics support, Bf.110 of ZG.26 on one of them also flew along with Capt. Romanese very concerned about the fate of his men. During this search, the plane was attacked by British fighters that wounded the Italian officer and the two Germans and severely harmed the twin-engine forcing the pilot to make an emergency landing in the desert. The three airmen were found and rescued the next day by a recon vehicle from the DAK that brought them to the necessary treatment at a field hospital.

In addition to the loss of 6 Ju.87 and the capture of 15 people, including pilots and gunners, they were lost during the searches also a G.50 and a Bf.110 with 4 wounded among Italians and Germans.

Despite the clear responsibility of the German commander Maj. Sorge who led the formation of Ju.87, ignoring the issues at the time specified, the numerous mitigating circumstances and contingencies emerged in the ill-fated mission, the commander of the 209th Sqd. was relieved of command and repatriated.

Rommel's episode did not produce positive effects due to the rapid release of the British forces and ended with a score of dead, fifty injured and 40 missing between Italian and German; thirty vehicles including Panzer, trucks and armored cars lost, a serious waste of fuel.

In early October, an appraisal of the Supreme Command on the relationship of Italian-German and British forces, did ascend to 570 the number of Axis planes divided among 450 Italian and 120 German (280 fighters, 190 bombers and dive bombers, 100 reconnaissance (observation reconnaissance), desert surveillance, links, transport, health). More significant number of enemy aircraft valued at around 1,100 (500 fighter and fighter-bombers, 400 medium and light bombers, 250 other specialty) divided between WDAF (western desert) and RAF/M.E. (Egypt, Palestine, Malta, Iraq). Strengthening A/A. and coastal Libya defense had been initiated in June by sending to N.A. 13 A/A batteries for the defense of the most important locations and 11 light batteries with 20 mm. machine guns for defense of the advanced air bases.

5 Italian and 2 German batteries were assigned to the anti-ship defense.

In anticipation of an offensive recovery that Rommel had in mind to implement in the fall against Tobruk and the Egyptian border, the Fl.Fu. Afrika arranged to reinforce its fighter units sending another group of JG.27 group equipped with the new Bf.109/F, faster version of the E and better armed with a more rational triangular layout (engine/fuselage).

Even the command of the 5th Air Fleet urged sending to Africa the new Macchi C.202, first aircraft with DB.601 linear motor and can reach 600 km/h.

Only deficiency usually insufficient armament with 2 synchronized SAFAT 12.7.[96]

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Two groups in Italy equipped with the new Macchi aircraft were already available and ready for operational use, but the GS/RA was hesitant to send them to Libya, intending to proceed with a careful technical development, a better assimilation of the new aircraft in the departments, and the completion with AS filters for the engines in order to avoid the decimation that struck the first G.50s sent to Libya in December 1940.

WDAF also received new aircraft under the law "Lend and Lease" of President Roosevelt, by entering into service of Douglas “Boston” light bombers. Speeds around 500 km/h, range of 1650 km, eight machine guns and 900 kg of bombs.

The influx of new aircraft assigned to the RAF Middle East, was further improved on west-east route realizing on the West Africa Ivory Coast (terminal Takora - Sekondi) where the aircraft were landed, reassembled and moved in the flight path Accra -Lagos -Kano -Fort Lamy -El Geneina -El Obeid -El Fasher - Khartoum -Wadi Halfa -Luxor -Channel Suez, a journey of about 4,500 kilometers long and certainly more difficult then the Mediterranean crossing, but more quiet and less then the African circumnavigation via Cape Good Hope.

On the eve of the British offensive conventionally called "Crusader", the for, losses incurred by the Armed Forces Italian-German included: 1,210 Italian dead, 4,200 wounded, 3,800 missing; about 600 Germans had fallen, 1,700 wounded, 700 missing.

The losses of the civilian population according to data provided by the Ministry of Italian Africa included 140 dead and over 200 injured in large part by air raids on Tripoli and Benghazi.

The aircraft of the RAF were preformed 83 attacks on Tripoli, 134 on Benghazi and had targeted mainly to hit the ports or the loading and unloading facilities.

But despite the destruction and damage caused by the air attacks, the two most important ports of Libya were constantly restored with great self-denial and sacrifice on the part of the Italians; to allow the regular flow of supplies that only in June-October 1941 did they amassed 375,000 tons of various materials and 125,000 tons of fuel.

On the night of November 18 - eve of Crusader - a group Commandos (6 officers and 53 soldiers) who had been landed three days before by the submarines “Torbay” and “Talisman” behind Axis lines near Beda Littoria, they arrived in the above locations with the task of attacking the HQ of Rommel and killing the German general.

This target was chosen from among three: the Italian HQ. of - Cirene, the SIM Center in Apollonia, the interruption of an important communications center of Axis.

The assault on the German HQ. (actually it was a command of the DAK quartermaster) caused the death of four German officers and some Commandos including that of the Group commander Col. Keyes.

Another group destroyed a point of refueling and, with the help of the Arabs, they scattered on the Gebel where the majority were captured.[97]

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Blank

Operation "Crusader"
(18 November 1941/10 January 1942)

With the approach of the fall season in North Africa, began to mature the most favorable period for climatic and environmental conditions to undertake new offensives initiatives.

It was because they were preparing for a long time the Axis on one side and the English on the other, accumulating stocks of materials, revitalize combat units, strengthening the workforce with other units, preparing the logistics organization, technique and the related services.

Some changes occurred at the command summit with replacements, alternations and changes necessary for a better functioning at every level.

The turnover in command of the 5th Air Fleet of Gen. Marchesi, the assigned responsibilities through directives to Gen. Rommel and the master of the Fl.Fu. Afrika Gen. Frohlich for the sector to the east of the Ain el Gazala meridian, the constitution in Italy of the O.B.S. (Ober Befehlshaber Sud) command-in-chief for the south entrusted to Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, which occurred in November 1941 to coincide with the organic strengthening of the Luftwaffe in the Mediterranean.

The operational period of stasis replaced on the Russian front with the arrival of the winter season, had allowed him to transfer to the Italian front the II Flieger Korps (Gen. Bruno Loerzer) that in addition to the existing X Pl. Kps. of General Hans Geisler and the Fl.Fu. Afrika was the organic makeup of the 2nd Luftflotte of which Kesselring was the proprietor commander.

Remaining in North Africa the operating segment, the Fl.Fu. Afrika was strengthened with new units and early November it appeared thus:

Bombing
III/LG.l of Ju.88
I/St.G.l of Ju.87
II/St.G.2 of Ju.87
I/St.G.3 of Ju.87
Fighters
I-II-III/JG.27 of Bf.109
III/JG.S3 of Bf.109
2nd Staf.I/NJG.2 of J u.88
3rd/7th/8th Staf.III/ZG.26 of Bf.110

A total of 190 aircraft of which 120 war efficient including: a bomber group, three Stukas, four fighters, four Sqd. including destroyers, and night fighters.

The 5th Air Fleet was also strengthened with the sending to Libya of multi-engine BT aircraft and fighters intended to replace the losses and for wear and tear suffered by the units during the long months of war in the desert.[98]

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As of 18 Nov. 1941 the 5th Air Fleet Libya presented itself thus:

West Sector Command

98th BT Gr. (Sqd. 241st/240th)	of BR.20	(Lt. Col. I. De Wittembeschi)	Castel Benito
236th Sqd. Aut. BaT	of Ju.87	(Capt. G. Santinoni)	Castel Benito
175th Sqd. RST	of SM.79	(Capt. R. Cantarella)	Castel Benito
3rd Gr. Aut. CT (Sqd. 153rd/154th/155th)	of CR.42	(Maj. G. Pugnali)	Sorman/Misurata
12th Gr. Aut. CT (Sqd. 160th/165th/159th)	of G.50	(Maj. B. Cudugnello)	Castel Benito
17th Gr. Aut. CT (Sqd. 71st/72nd/80th)	of MC.202	(assigned to N.A. departing from Campoformido)	
157th Gr. Aut. CT (Sqd. 384th /385th /357th)	of MC.200	(assigned to N.A. departing from Ciampino)	
145th Gr. Aut. T (Sqd. 600th/604th/610th)	SM.75/SM.74/SM.82	(Lt. Col. F. Mazzetti)	Castel Benito
Sec. C.N.	of CR.42		Mellaha

A total of 145 airplanes of the first line of which 101 are efficient.

Central Sector Command

160th Gr. Aut. CT (Sqd. 394th /375th /393rd)	of CR.42	(Lt. Col. F. Zanni)	Benghazi /Benina
360th Sqd. (155th Gr. Aut. CT)	of G.50	(Capt. G. Cavalieri)	Benghazi /Benina
174th Sqd. RST	of SM.79	(Capt. F. Ronzi)	Berka
239th Sqd. B.a.T.	of Ju.87	(Capt. G. Cenni)	Benghazi /Benina
244thSqd. Aut. RS	of SM.81	(Capt. E. Iaccone, then Cap. V. Brescianini)	Benghazi/Benina
Sec. C.N.	of CR.42		

Available 82 aircraft of which 54 are efficient.

East Sector Command

8th St. BT.-27th Gr. (Sqd. 18th/52nd)	of SM.79	(Lt. Col. E. Mazzola)	Martuba
28th Gr. BT (Sqd. 10th)	of SM.79	(Maj. M. Bianchini)	Martuba
13th St. BT. -11th Gr. (Sqd. 1st/4th)	of BR.20	(Lt. Col. G. Aini)	Barce
43rd Gr. BT. (Sqd.3rd/5th)	of BR.20	(Lt. Col. P. Pagliocchini)	Derna
209th Sqd. BaT.	of Ju.87	(Capt. G. Zanazzo)	Derna
20th Gr. Aut. CT. (Sqd. 352nd /353rd/151st)	of G.50	(Lt. Col. M. Bonzano)	Martuba
155th Gr. Aut. CT. (Sqd. 378th/ 351st)	of G.50	(Maj. L. Bianchi)	Ain el Gazala
19th Sqd. RS. (28th Gr. BT)	on SM.79	(Capt. G. La Penna)	Derna
376th Sqd. Aut. CT	on CR.42 B.A.	(Capt. I. Lalatta)	Ain el Gazala
279th Sqd. Aut. AS	of SM.79	(Capt. Giulio Marini)	Derna

R. A. Aviation for Libya (Lt. Col. Giovanni Rocco)

15th Gr. OA (Sqd. 125th/ 32nd)	of Ca.311	(Maj. Bruno Cerne)	Agedabia/ Benghazi
67th Gr. OA (Sqd. 129th /132nd)	of Ro.37/ Ca.311	(Capt. G. Minervino)	Ain el Gazala/ Benghazi
69th Gr. OA (Sqd. 118th/123rd)	of Ca.311	(Maj. Hector Zambaldi)	Zuara[99]

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Aviation R.M. for Libya (Lt. Col. Camillo Gentile)

145th Sqd. RM	of Cant.501	(Capt. N. Albanesi)	Pisida
196th Sqd. RM	of Cant.501	(Capt. Massimo Giovannozzi)	Menelaus /Benghazi
Sec. Relief	of Cant.506	(Lt., Gaetano Mastrodicasa)	Benghazi

214 aircraft available which of 146 war efficient.

Colonial garrison aviation

1st and 2nd Group APC - Sahara Air Bn. (Ca.309 -CR.42 -SM.81)

Divided by the 5th Air Fleet Integrated specialties from Esercitavia [Army] and Marinavia [Navy] units and excluding auxiliary aircraft (transport, links, training) included:

Bombers / Dive bombers	n. 83 (51 Eff)
torpedo bombers	n. 5 (4 Eff.)
R.S. T .	n. 26 (15 Eff.)
Fighters.	N. 259 (193 Eff.)
Maritime reconnaissance	n. 16 (11 Eff.)
The aerial observation	n. 52 (30 Eff.)
TOTAL	n. 441 airplanes of which 304 efficient.

The most important change was made from the organic allocation in the 5th Air Fleet of the 17th Group Aut. CT equipped with the new Macchi C.202 that by early November had been stationed in south Ciampino waiting to move to Libya. Numerous units available to the 5th Air Fleet: 13 Squadrons of bombers/torpedo planes, 16 fighter, 12 reconnaissance / exploration should not mislead since the organic texture was somewhat reduced, and the efficiency of the units was around on average 40 -45% of the force available.

SUPPORT OF THE WDAF TO THE WAR OPERATIONS

The failed operations "Brevity" and "Battle Axe" made by the 8th Army on the Libyan-Egyptian border, constituted for thought for the War Office, and in July the Air Marshall Tedder was summoned to London for talks with top leaders the British government.

It was taken into account the situation in the western desert and the national defense commission expressed its concern point of view of the survey results and the methods used in tactical support to Army troops, calling for new directions in view of recovery based on the “Crusader" offensive, the operation scheduled for November set on achieving two fundamental objectives:

1) re-conquest of Cyrenaica;

2) conquest of Tripolitania.

The main task that was assigned to the WDAF contemplated the destruction of the Axis armored forces that made up in the hands of Rommel the gravest danger to the 8th Army.

To fulfill this task, the WDAF would receive adequate reinforcements and flight material suitable to complete by the end of November, the new tactical and operational organization.

The FAA would have also received new planes to strengthen the units embarked on the M.F. and those based on land, whose participation was coordinated in a new operational group - 201st -which should have cooperate with the RAF/ME and with WDAF.

It was also planned an intensive training cycle on the new flight material, new tactical methods designed and programmed effectively for fighters, fighter/bombers, light bombers, tactical reconnaissance and support and combat aircraft (FAA, NF, RF, AS).[100]

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The new cycle has essentially consisted of setting a different mentality and a more congenial employment to transform WDAF in a unit with great flexibility and mobility with wide autonomy, which was to liberate it from the methods used in the past now considered no longer suitable to the evolution of the air war applied specifically in the western desert.

On September 5, the Imperial G.S. sent to Q.G. Cairo for the Middle East plans for "Crusader" in conjunction with a strengthening of advanced AA defense strengthened by 250 automatic cannons Bofors 40 for added defensive autonomy of terrestrial units that had greatly liberate WDAF of the tasks of defending the approach.

The strengthening of the RAF/ME according to schedule from Imperial G.S. agree with the Joint Staff of the RAF, it would have seen an increase in squadrons of various specialties from 34 units to 40 in late October, but increased the workforce to 50 squadrons to the end of December 1941, with the set 1st line of 900 aircraft including fighters, fighter/bombers, tactical reconnaissance, light and medium bombers, photo/strategic reconnaissance.

Aviation for the Navy would be increased from 8 to 12 Sqdns. The total number of aircraft in the Middle East, first in 1046 units (October), to 1262 (December). Also other Beaufighter heavy fighters would be assigned for tactical missions and nighttime offensive long-range, Beaufort torpedo bombers intended primarily to Malta. For the logistic support were assigned four transport squadrons.

The Hurricane MK I aircraft would be gradually replaced with the MK II version; for night interception with Beaufighter equipped with A.I. It would be made up of an ad hoc G.C.I. (Ground Control Interceptor) which was coordinating the defense area of the canal and obstruct the night raids of the Luftwaffe of Crete. Also boosted the Coastal Command with men and new aircraft including the Martin Baltimore (A.30) in place of the Maryland. The poor production of Blenheim was complemented by L.L.A. assignments new twin-engine Douglas Boston while the II MK version of the Wellington would have replaced the previous MK.I.

To facilitate navigation and the Ferry/Service between Takoradi and the Canal, the US would be provided to the RAF transport units the twin-engine Douglas C.47 that the British christened "Dakota". The increase in the number of aircraft supplied to the RAF/ME with the exception of Malta, recorded 549 aircraft in June, 722 in August, 780 in October. Also increasing the actual trained in the Middle East from England, Iraq, Rhodesia, South Africa and Australia, while in Canada proceeded rapidly the Inter-organization of aviation education, which was to provide fully for all the needs of Commonwealth.

In Egypt they were made the first O.T.U. (Operational Training Unit) for the operational training unit, which with an additional instruction quarterly cycle had to strengthen the core of the old pilots of Western Desert Air Force in late 1941 was reduced to only 80 men.

The expansion program of the RAF/ME contemplated for 1942 an increase of 35,000 men for the 62 Squadrons and the expected 5 O.T.U. instructional up to a total of 65,000 to bring the actual 85,000 men established by Tedder program although this credit line was deemed excessive by Churchill and resized to a workforce of 1,000 men per squadron of the 1st line (16 aircraft + 2 spare) airmen including 7,000 men used to Takoradi-Canal ferry service, the 6,500 specialists for broadcasting, the 3,700 workers for sighting services and radar-guided fighter coordination.

The Air Marshall Tedder disagree pleaded with the Prime Minister's thoughts and obtained an additional increase of 4,500 officers and 64,700 specialists to be added to the establishment plan to the RAF/ME.

The technical and logistical organization in the new aviation restructuring for the Middle East, under the responsibility of Vice Air Marshall Dawson, comprised the main workshops of aero-nautical repairs (BSD -Base Salvage Depot) n. 103 (Aboukir)), no. 102 (Abu Sweir), n. 107 (Kasfareet), n. 101 (Massara) intended for the embarked armaments.

The identification and the attack by the Axis on B.S.D. n. 102 and 103 advised the shift to Heliopolis of aviation engines section to preserve the substantial body of new air strikes, which caused between Abu Sweir Aboukir and the destruction of facilities and 26 aircraft under repair with damage to another 49. The motors aviation lost were 40 types of the radial engines together with much valuable technical equipment.[101]

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It was also necessary to decentralize the A.S.P. (Air Storage Park) from Abu Sweir to Boulac to preserve the special parts for planes and an extra deposit was implanted in Massara (M.U.S.D. -maintenance Unit Storage Depot n. 111).

The BOAC aircraft workshops Heliopolis added an invaluable contribution to the repairs and maintenance service, especially with the Helvan Section for Hurricanes and Tomahawks.

For airplanes removed from England and the USA was implanted in Port Sudan a large assembly hall and the staff of the groups 203rd (Sudan) and 207th (East Africa) which is no longer operational after the end of military operations in E.A., was used to transform into repair units and training the two groups which benefited the bases and former Italian bases of Gura and Addis Ababa, where they were conveyed with the Ferry system, hundreds of aircraft came from the Middle East.

The new structure given to WDAF included: 204th Group (V. Air Marshall Coningham and 202nd (Commodore Elmhirst) that had absorbed men and dissolved commands means respectively: H.Q. RAF/ME and Air HQ. Egypt.

The ordering of the Royal Air Force saw as the basic unit Squadron (16 aircraft + 2 spare) divided into 4 sections with the colors red, green, yellow, white. More squadrons formed the Wing (at the level of the Stormo) and more Wings formed the Group (a Brigade level), formed the most Groups, Command.

In addition to the tactical field Sections were operating the Flight (2 sections) and generally the whole squadrons. In support of WDAF to use but with autonomous functions and addiction RAF Middle East Command, was operating 205th Group (Commodore L.L. Mac Lean) with 5 Sqdns. Wellingtons, 201st Group for naval cooperation (Commodore LH Slater) intended for mixed use, 206th Group maintenance/repairs (Commodore CB Cooke) and the predominantly tactical ground support the 253rd Wing autonomous, which was to represent a likeness of what the Luftwaffe did with its LG (Lehr Geschwader), the experimental use units for studies and experiences tactics according to the new doctrine called "tactical air support" meant to be generalized to the entire WDAF soon perfected and codified.

In anticipation of this special use were being set up the first A.S.C. units (Air Support Control) to be assigned to the G.U.s of the 8th Army, composed of specialists aerial observation, radio communications, transmissions, code and tactical doctrines. With the assignment of ASC was possible to make precision air operations on specific targets reported by the command of the G.U.s to which they belong, indicated on the ground with special reference and to do so the fighter sections, fighter/bombers and light bombers as a long-range precision artillery barrage function, interdiction, antitank, demolition. The objectives designated by the ASC called FASL (Forward Air Support Link) and specified with numbers and names on the conventional battlefield, were identified and coded at brigade level command (infantry or armored) to which organic entity was expected to be awarded ASC.

Between June and October the Wellingtons of the 205th Group and those based in Malta attacked at night the port of Tripoli in 72 raids employing a total of 357 aircraft (on average 5 per mission) while during the day the attacks occurred on the port of Benghazi by Blenheim and Maryland. Raids were made on other points of the Mediterranean: the Aegean, Crete and Sicily for a total of 170 bombing aircraft employed.

The most important objectives of Cyrenaica including Benghazi, Derna and Bardia were assigned to the Wellingtons of Sqdns. 37th, 38th, 70th and 148th (102 raids on the port of Benghazi) with use of a 578 twin-engine (average 5.5 per mission) that operated for about 15 consecutive weeks, achieving the purpose of obstructing the unloading operations in dramatically, and seriously delay the start of the necessary supplies to the front.

The survey was carried out by the Marylands of squadrons 12th and 24th SAAF and the Blenheim of 39th Sqdn. who carried out even offensive missions on airfields in the area (Gambut, Ain el Gazala, El Fteiab, etc.).

Fighters were involved in the protection of advanced fields equipped in the area Fuka, Sidi Barrani, Maaten Baqqush, Marsa Matruk, the direct escort of naval convoys to Tobruk, night interception.[102]

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The lack of a previous radio and technical-operational organization for night interceptions (the first radars were assigned to the RAF/ME in the summer of 1941) had not allowed effective interventions since the EWS (Early Warning System) posts - radar sighting points - were in the process of being set up and it was only possible in October to shoot down the first Ju.88 with a Beaufighter equipped with AI guided by a G.C.I. stationed in the Alessandria area.

The enemy air raids were heavier and more numerous than those the RAF was able to carry out and saw the presence on average of 12/14 Ju.88/He.111 and 6/8 twin-engine/tri-engine aircraft of the R.A. between BR.20 and SM.79.

According to the reports H.Q. RAF/ME, in the four months between July and October, although the Luftwaffe announced the loss of only 81 planes and R.A. were destroyed 395 Axis planes (142 Germans and 253 Italians) of just 89 destroyed by various causes. The losses reported by the RAF were 198 aircraft lost in combat and 48 destroyed on the ground for a total of 246 aircraft, thus exceeding the losses provided by Axis commands.

The Military Intelligence Service (MIS -Military Intelligence Service) had confirmed the presence in the Aegean (Crete, Greece) of 75% of German bombers of the X CAT, 40% of the tactical force (Ju.87/Bf. 109/110) at the Flieger Fuhrer Afrika and II CAT with 60% between bombers and fighters in Sicily with He.111, Ju.88, Bf.109, Ju.87. There were also a hundred aircraft Ju.52 transportation and fifty aircraft for coastal surveillance and rescue at sea. A special squadron of FW.200 four-engine couriers, place particular tasks: strategic distant reconnaissance, transport and urgent mining on the Suez Canal operating from Heraklion airport.

The strength of the X Flieger Korps varied according to the M.I.S. From 400-500 aircraft, of which 250 of 1st line divided between a hundred of fighters, fighter/heavy (Bf.109/110) and 150 dive bombers (Ju.87). (Inaccurate information because the X CAT had Stukas).

The R.A. had in Libya according to British information, seventy bombers and 140 fighter; in the Dodecanese 37 bombers and 46 fighters. (Inaccurate information the first, very close the second).

The service relationships between the X Flieger Korps and RA were coordinated by a special office of the Luftwaffe called Italuft entrusted to General Ritter von Pohl. (Inaccurate information). The war activities between Fl.Fu. Afrika and 5th Air Fleet was completely independent even if the Italian side there was a large participation of fighters, used for directly escorting German bombers; one example, according to English information, of aerial cooperation between the Axis.

THE RECOVERY OFFENSIVE

Between days 15/16 November the Italian air reconnaissance signaled between Fort Magdalene and Marsa Matruk an unusual forward deployment of enemy motorized divisions with an increase of 50% compared to those established in the days 12/13 (from 2,000 to 3,150 vehicles); also it recorded a significant increase in antiaircraft reaction a sign indicative of the strengthening of the English defensive fire device. On the 17th other motorized columns were spotted approaching the west and on the same day the P.G. Afrika was put on alert.

The Axis deployment included the following positions:

C.A.M.	Arm. Div., "Ariete" (Gen. Balotta) at Bir el Gobi Mot. Div., "Trieste" (Gen. Piazzoni) at Hachcim Bir / Bir el Harmat Re. Co. CAM (Col. De Meo) in an intermediate position between the "Ariete" and "Trento"
XXI CORP. (P.G.A.)	Inf. Div. “Pavia "(Gen. Franceschini) south of EI Adem Inf. Div. "Bologna" (Gen., Gloria) north Via Balbi (Tobruk area) Inf. Div. “Brescia "(Gen. Zambon) east front of Tobruk Inf. Div. “Savona "(Gen. De Giorgis) Bardia-Sidi Omar..Capuzzo Mot. Div. “Trento "(Gen. De Stefanis) south front of Tobruk Elements of “Sabratha" Inf. Div. south of the Via Balbi (Tobruk area)
D.A.K. (P.G.A.)	Div. Afrika ZbV (Gen. Summermann) between Sidi and Sidi Rezegh Resciasc 15th Pz. Div. (Gen. Neurnann-Silkow) at Abiar Zaid 21st Pz. Div. (Gen. von Ravenstein) Trig / Capuzzo / Sidi Mgianer 3rd and 33rd Recon units at Sidi Omar and N.E. Bir el Gobi[103]

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For the second time in a year the British 8th Army launched its winter offensive to win over Libya. British soldiers on a "Valentine" tank during operation "Crusader"

The consistency in armored vehicles starring of 69 Pz.II, 136 Pz.III, 46 Pz.IV to 251 tanks in DAK and 137 M.13/41 and 52 L.35 in the CAM. Another 75 Med and 138. Lt. tanks were assigned to other units and principals of Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and the depots.

The Re.Co. (Reparto Esplorante Corazzato) received the first AB.41 armored cars supplied to the P.A.I. Mobile Battalion, armored cars equipped with excellent features and speed. It was an ancillary of the CAM. The DAK disposal of the new 50/43 A/T cannon mod. 41. PAK present in 96 specimens and fielded on the Sollum-Halfaya line 23 of the dreaded multipurpose 88/56 mod. 41 guns.

The total number of armored vehicles prepared by the British 8th Army (Gen. Cunningham) amounted to 724 specimens type "Valentine" and "Matilda" for the support to the infantry, "Cruiser" and "Stuart" for armored units. 69 other tanks were in the fortress of Tobruk.

The plan "Crusader" prepared by Gen. Cunningham and approved by Gen. Auchinleck, was set to the following movements: crossing the Egyptian border opposite Fort Maddalena (50 km south of Sidi Omar) by the 7th Arm. Div. and the South African 1st Inf. Div. (XXX Corps) (Gen. C.W.M. Norrie).

Isolation of the garrison of Sollum by the XIII Corps (2nd New Zealander Inf. Div., 4th Inf. Div. Anglo-Indian, the 1st Arm. Bde).

In the interval between the 13th Corps in the north and 30th in the south (average width 100/110 km) would operate the fast 4th Armored Brigade. In conjunction with the offensive from the west, the Tobruk garrison would have launched an attack to the East-S.E pushing towards Gabr Saleh where would come the XXX Corps diversionary attacks were provoked from Giarabub towards Gialo and beyond.

The locations of the various Axis commands were as follows: Pz. Gr. "Afrika" - - Gambut / Bardia; XXI Corps (Gen. E. Navarrini) -El Adem; C.A.M. (Gen. Gambara) -Bir el Gobi; X Corp -Benghazi; XX Corp. -Tripoli.

The transformations that had been received in the Middle East with the establishment of the 9th Army (General Maitland Wilson) and 8th (Gen. Alan Cunningham) had been intended to harmonize the distribution of British forces and strengthen the most dangerous areas first among all the Egyptian Western. For this purpose, the 8th Army had added the XIII Army Corps (Gen. Godwin-Austen) and XXX (Gen. V.V. Pope) even the X (Gen. W.G. Holmes) while Gen. W.W. Norrie had replaced the deceased Gen. Pope killed in a plane crash.

The planning for operation "Crusader" absorbed all the attention of the commander in chief Gen. Auchinleck, determined to prove to the Imperial War Cabinet that the 8th Army would not disappoint the expectations of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who had devoted to preparation of the new offensive all his will and hopes and all that material as we had intended abundantly, since the challenging offensive had the greatest success.

At the end of October they had arrived in Egypt the following materials: 300 tanks mod. A.15 baptized "Crusader", 170 infantry tanks “Matilda” Mark II and 111 “Valentine”, 300 USA production tanks mod. M.3 A1 "Stuart" baptized "Honey" and very fast, because with radial aviation engines (64 km/h), 600 field gun from 88/27, 240 heavy and light anti-aircraft guns, 200 antitank cannons 40/50, 900 infantry mortars, 34,000 vehicles of which 7,000 US production.[104]

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They were placed at the Marsa Matruk area 32,000 tons of materials.

They were completed at 100% all the armored units and formed new ones. The tank power between 8th Army and the Axis was brought as 3 to 2 equal ratio was obtained between WDAF and the Italian-German air force.

For operations deep into the southernmost desert (32° Lat.) was formed a special unit called "Oasis Force" destined to operate on the main route Giarabub-Gialo-Marada and with time to provide the necessary protection to a secret air base called LG 125 (Landing Ground n. 125) constituted by the LRDG staff in a desert town 160 km NW of Giarabub (Bab el Serir), located in the crow flies 350/360 km from Benghazi between 23° 50' Long. and 31° 06' Lat. and then be able to hit all the targets to the east of the city and with great tactical surprise on the origin.

Important tasks were also entrusted to the LRDG of (Col. Bagnold) which constituted two squadrons with six patrols to special missions and Lt. Col. Prendergast maintained radio contact with the two prepared secret bases in Cyrenaica (Gebel Achdar and Es Sahabi West) from which came the reports and information to the Headquarters of the 8th Army on Axis movements.

The first job forces made available by WDAF for "Crusader" included 8 squadrons: 1st SAAF, 2nd SAAF, 94th, 238th, 274th ,112th, 229th and 250th with RAF Hurricane and Kittyhawk; 5 sqdns. light bombers: 14th and 24th SAAF, 39th, 45th, 55th with Maryland and RAF Blenheim; 4 fighter/bombers: 3rd SAAF, 4th SAAF, 80th and 260th RAF Hurricane and Tomahawk; a squadron 35th for tactical reconnaissance with Hurricane and reserves the 253rd Wing with squadrons 208th, 237th and 451st of tactical support Hurricanes.

The budget of each squadron consisted 16/18 aircraft first line to which were to add another 7 reserve at the A.R.P. (Aircraft Replacement Pool) an advanced deposit lodged at Wadi Natrun in anticipation of “Crusader”, to which they could tap into the operational squadrons to cover losses in combat or in accidents. Altogether were available 450 aircraft of the 1st line and 120 of the reserve.

The units of WDAF were to also add squads of groups 201st and 250th with about 160/170 other aircraft of bombers, fighters, torpedo bombers, reconnaissance aircraft with a total of at least 16/18 per squadron.

The A.R.P. formed with the absorption of Maintenance Unit gave excellent results as in November alone topped the organic needs of the units providing 232 planes they replaced from time to time with depots and withdrawals at aircraft repair shops where flocked respectively, aircraft from Takoradi, Gura, Port Sudan and the Mediterranean via Malta and those posted to the rear by line units for inspections and repairs.

For the implementation of A.S.C. Service, which commenced at the "Crusader" had been prepared by the command WDAF accommodation in three L.G., RDF type of sighting 10 AWS devices installed in trucks, operating in cooperation with a Mobile G.C.I. in a limited area and called "Fighter Airfield Area" (30°/31º Lat.24 °/25º Long.). On advanced materials fields had been herded, supplies, technical personnel, radio communications equipment, personnel of the RAF Regiment for the protection of the airfields and mobile anti-aircraft defense with Bofors 40/56. The G.C.I. would coordinate the intervention of fighters to facilitate interceptions and through the ASC provided its Flights in tactical mission safety in the operating area signaling the presence of Axis fighters revealed with mod. 10 AWS radar distance between 80-90 miles (130-140 km). With these revolutionary innovations the air war in North Africa was a big leap in quality and entered a phase of extraordinary technological developments that radically transformed concepts and doctrines of the fight in the skies. In October the whole of WDAF staff underwent in Canal and Palestine airports a final shift to round of tactical co-operation under the training supervision of Captain B.E. Embry, manager of new attack techniques, which had prepared a new tactical study after the failure of "Battle Axe".

On October 20, the latest information gleaned from M.I.S. They gave the Axis 385 planes in service in Cyrenaica against 528 of WDAF.

Another 72 German bombers were between Crete and Greece, 79 other aircraft in Tripoli.[105]

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Was reported the presence among the fighters of Fl. Fu. Afrika the new Messerschmitt model. "F" with greater speed than the "E" version. The “Valentine” tank should hinder hopes of the British, the appearance of the panzer model Mk.IV F.2 equipped with cannon of 75/43 countered by quick firing gun of 40/60 that arming the English tanks. For the Italian M.13/41 medium tank instead did not fed of particular concern because of its technical mediocrity unchanged compared to mod. M.13/40. Were available in the 8th Army 738 tanks of the 1st line as follows: 62 A.9/10, 210 A.15, 173 M.3A1, 201 Mk.II/III, 92 tanks of various model. 259 others were under repair or subject to change in Egypt and 232 of the US model were traveling through Cape of Good Hope.

The RAF/Malta was asked to co-operate indirectly to "Crusader" with the task to attack with bombers / torpedo planes Axis convoys, embarkation / disembarkation ports of Naples, Palermo, Tripoli and Benghazi. Other tasks were assigned to the Royal Navy in Malta with its DDs and submarines.

The preparations were started by the Wellingtons of 205th Group who attacked on several occasions assisted at night Benghazi, by day from Maryland in charge of the SAAF to hit the smaller port of Derna, Bardia and Bomba. From November 4 to 13 were targeted for 10 consecutive nights of Derna depots with Wellington, Blenheim Maryland and supported by the Albacore of FAA in flare function: a practical way to profitably use the outdated biplanes otherwise unemployable. The Blenheim of the 55th Sqdn. They had in the meantime found accommodation on the desert LG.125, occasionally used to avoid arousing suspicion in reconnaissance Axis. But also in the Italian-German camp there had been some changes with the arrival in the Mediterranean of the U.Boote "Arnauld Group" and one of these – the U.81 - just came from Gibraltar, attacked and sank the CV. "Ark Royal" just back from a Hurricane resupply mission to Malta on the day of November 13, followed the 25th by the U.331 that equally bold and lucky, sank, within minutes the BB. “Barham” north of Bardia reducing the strength of M.F. to 3 BB. only two of which are efficient as the "Warspite" being under repair from battle of Crete. The Wellingtons attacked Naples, Palermo and the airports of Sicily and Tripoli destroying 16 Axis aircraft while in Libya suffered other attacks the airfields of Benina, Derna, Barce, Berka, Tmimi, Martuba, Ain el Gazala, Gambut and Baheira by the WDAF.

Axis night attacks occurred on the Egyptian airports Fuka, Maaten Baqqush, Suez with destruction of plants and materials. Bf.110 destroyers attacked Giarabub destroying a Blenheim and damaging another 7 twin-engine with fuel fires and damage to plants.

With the arrival in Egypt of the first units of the SAS Regiment. (Special Air Service RAF) with highly trained paratroopers in coups, sabotage and destruction, even the H.Q. RAF/ME was available prepared men for special missions to oppose the LRDG normally used by the Army for identical purposes and that he had been raised, strengthened and expanded its organization by transferring most of its squadrons from Siwa to Cufra with detachment to Hasciscia in the south-eastern Libyan desert and mobile principals to Tazerbo and Zighan. Between the months of June and the middle of November the LRDG had done a great exploration to recognize the desert terrain that led to Sirtica and Tripolitania, evaluate the possibility of following it with columns of vehicles, establish caches at predetermined distances (gasoline, food, water, ammunition) and many reports were forwarded to HQ Cairo reporting possibilities, routes, difficulties, orographic characteristics for a possible penetration from the south arch of Sidra that the British command had in mind to implement alternative and complementary action in the "Crusader". But the LRDG did other things too. In agreement with the Arabs organized observation posts placed in Gebel Achdar and upper eyelid along the current Cyrenaica "Balbia" from Barce Berta and in the es Sirual area (80 km west of Mechili) where signaled in Cairo situation of the Axis G.U. in transit on the coastal area, their composition, the type of armament and equipment supplied, the organic, the intensity of automobile traffic, places of control and surveillance, fuel depots, command, and the main forums and many other useful implemented with the help of the Arabs where informers and saboteurs were recruited who had carried out acts of sabotage in Bir Dufan (telephone lines interrupted) in Benghazi / K2 (3 aircraft destroyed and three others damaged in March).[106]

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On the eve of the "Crusader" the LRDG received strict orders to carry out a series of sabotage in the rear of the Axis, particularly on columns of vehicles, fueling areas, road works and installations, depots of materials and ammunition in the stretch from Sirte to Benghazi and Barce to Alcroma.

The SAS Regt. had from the H.Q./RAF M.E. precise action directives assigned to Maj. David Sterling commander of the detachment, which was sent at first to Giarabub, then, after the occupation of Gialo the new secret base Maragh where he received the new provisions under the “Crusader”, consistent in attacks on airfields of Ain el Gazala and Tmimi after a mission that began with paratroopers had failed to navigation difficulties and weather the night on November 15, with the killing and capture of almost all participants. A "Bombay", carrying 12 of the SAS men was even forced to land by a German fighter and captured intact. On the eve of the English offensive there had been another failed mission to the work of the 11th Commandos who were to attack the Rommel’s HQ. near Apollonia and kill all the occupants. But even this step as it will be more fully described, did not obtain positive results.

Even the Germans made attempt in imitation of the English coups using the special units of the "Brandenburg" Regiment (a special corps trained for sabotage and destruction in the rear) but also they failed in the enterprise, where the detachment "Afrika" was landed, from the U.331 near El Daba in the night on November 15 with the task of destroying the Alexandria-Marsa Matruk railroad on which flowed supplies for the enemy: spotted by security units of the English, the men of “Brandenburg" were killed or captured after a firefight.

In the preparatory period from October 14 to 17 November, the WDAF employed most of its units for missions in Cyrenaica losing 80 aircraft including fighters and bombers against 22 German and 35 Italian destroyed during the raids. November 18 had been prepared 31 squadrons deployed on three operating segments: advanced, middle, rear and comprising 14 Sqd's. 128 fighter and fighter/bombers, two heavy/combat, 8 of light bombers, 4 of medium bombers, 3 tactical reconnaissance, 2 surveillance Flights/strategic observations. The units belonging to the following air forces: 6 to SAAF, 2 to RAAF, 1 to Rhodesia, 1 to France, 21 to England.

THE ENGLISH BEGINNINGS OF "CRUSADE"

The new British offensive in North Africa, designed in the intentions and hopes of the English to beat once more Italians and their allies Germanic tracing the events of "Compass", it had such contrasting aspects, confused and contradictory as to leave friends and perplexed enemies on the tangled battlefield of Marmarica had lost control of the actions, the general situation, the location of his units and even more the outcome, the results of individual battles that fragmentary and disorderly had occurred or were in progress unwinding the confusing terrain of struggle.

The greatest surprise, however, was by Rommel, which gave unexpectedly, for the first time, a discontinuous yield, an opacity of behavior, a lack of operational lucidity and maneuver that surprised a somewhat everyone: Italian, English and also some of the most quoted German commanders. An early symptom since later, between the retreat of December, the events of summer 1942, the battle of El Alamein, Tunisia and Normandy was to provide other; convincing confirmations on and discussed contrasting personalities of the German general.

The British attack was manifested in its breadth and gravity suddenly and contrary to the forecasts of Rommel and "strategic magicians” the DAK, who thought highly unlikely an offensive on a large scale of the British, as rightly noted and reported by Italian commands once again snubbed and overlooked by the Germans. "Situation unchanged" recorded the war diary of the Operations Office of the P.G. Afrika as of November 18, 1941 in the same time that the British were launching "Crusader".[107]

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The same day to the instructions given by P.G.A. to the D.A.K. was set in motion from east to west to reach the planned positions the attack on Tobruk was to leave undefended the Egyptian front was entrusted - 80 km west - to only the "*Ariete*" which fortunately will block part of the impetuousness of the enemy armored units, swept almost undisturbed by an efficient contrast into the interior of Marmarica. On the morning of the 19th resulted surrounded the right area of the Italian-German static deployment between Sollum and Halfaya, the 22nd Arm. Brigade aimed at full speed towards the junction of Bir el Gobi where they clashed with the "*Ariete*" losing 40 tanks and a number of prisoners and retreating to the east after this unexpected resistance from the brave Italian soldiers, who had had more than 200 dead, wounded and missing, 34 M.13 tanks destroyed along with eight guns.

The situation was so uncertain as to surprise a whole fighter group of R.A. intention to refuel in the springboard field of Sidi Rezegh, well versed in the Axis area and then felt more than safe to dangers.

At 16:00 the same day, a Armoured detachment of the 6th Royal Tanks Regt. of the 7th Arm. Brigade. (Gen. G.M.O. Davy) under the command of Col. Campbell, who was marching undisturbed by Bir el Gobi towards the Sidi Azeis- Umm el Hatian roadway to stop the Axis traffic, surprised the airfield of Sidi Rezegh (20 km to the east of El Adem) many Italian aircraft in technical stop and quickly attacked them with "Stuart" tanks by hitting them with the 37 mm guns at a distance and up close with machine guns to prevent them from taking off. 19 planes were destroyed and only two were able to take off. They were captured vehicles and 80 between pilots, specialists and airmen of the Regina Areonautica.

When Rommel was convinced that it was not a deep raid but a real offensive on broad front, ran for cover by reversing the direction of travel to DAK and implementing a series of countermoves that disorient the British for the temerity they were aiming but eventually confuse even the commander of Panzer Gruppe Afrika.

While British armored units moved to the west and northwest, the German panzer formations were brought to the east, south east and west at the same time. DAK units penetrated Egyptian territory in an attempt to cut supplies to the British XXX Corps and British armored groups were pushing towards Tobruk in Libya, attempting to rejoin the besieged garrison that pressed to move eastward and facilitate the meeting with the 8th Army.

The Italian units for their part repelled their attacks from the west and from the south-east and the great battleground for a length of 150 km and a width of a hundred, occurred a frightening confusion intermingled of units and operating from different directions and locations from those stipulated aggravated lack the communications news link between the CAM and the DAK and isolated current performance remained equally the infantry of the XXI Corps and the same for the Supercomando ASI. General Rommel for 4 days there was no news of him and had to track him down at any cost to call him back to his duties as subordinate Gen. Bastico to put aware of the situation and have him precise information on the outcome of the battle.

The surprise caused by "Crusader" the with Axis Air Force command had also left uncertainty, while WDAF that had no concerns like that, it acted decisively with a number of aircraft ever seen before in a large part of the new model that gave them from the start air superiority on the battlefield.

On the night of the 18th were transferred on LG.122, 123, 124 and 126 (Ex Scegga, Uescek, & el Heira and south of Maddalena) the 33rd and 80th squadrons equipped with Hurricane II/B tactical support, that in the morning of 19th attacked the airfields near the border by destroying Hs.126 reconnaissance at El Adem, a Ca.309 and CR.42 at Gialo knocking down another 2 CR.42 caught in flight. At Martuba were lost 2 SM.79 and at Tmimi surprised 5 Ju.52 taking off by the Beaufighter of the 272nd Sqdn. and other decentralized aviation field including Bf.109 and Ju.87. 4 British aircraft were shot down by the A/A fire.

The same day the 15th Pz. Div. clashed near Bir el Gobi with 4th and 22nd Arm. Bdes. and destroyed their 26 tanks between "Valentine", "Crusader" and "Honey" a clear sign that the new tanks, the British and Americans could not be considered equal to the German.

On the 20th of the Maryland bombers of the 12th Sqdn. attacked the gathered area of the *Ariete* Div. and divisional communications center of El Adem, also launching propaganda leaflets inviting the Italian soldiers to abandon the Germans and to surrender to the 8th Army; the 21st the DAK attacked the South Africa 1st Inf. Div. and the 7th Arm. Div. with the support of Ju.87 escorted by Bf.109 that felled 7 P.40 against the felling of 3 Messerschmitt.[108]

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In aid of the proven British armored units they intervened called by divisional ASC and with the collaboration of the RDF, the 3rd and 112th Sqdns. and that they engage in combat with attacking German planes while the Germanic tanks moving in the desert.

On the 22nd heavy bombing was repeated on the *Ariete* and *Trieste* positions in Bir Hacheim area by Blenheim and Hurricane, P .40 and only a strong fighter Italian-Germans effort striking down 4 enemy planes of the 45th Sqdn., was slacken the pace of the raids that were integrated in the same day by the intervention of Beaufighter who performed 75 mission flights on Axis motorized-armored columns causing heavy losses in men and equipment.

In the reports of the WDAF it was mentioned the contribution and precision demonstrated by the 80th and 272nd squadrons in the attacks on the ground.

On the night of the new offensive missions Wellingtons Albacore supported by the FAA in the Pathfinder function (marking of targets) around Tobruk to ease the pressure on the garrison and facilitate the sortie eastward.

On November 23, the battle lasted still confused and uncertain in its development to the point that the commands did not know the whereabouts of subordinate units. The Stabs Kolumns Rommel (motorized detachmant of the GS/PGA) during a day in the desert raid caught near Gabr Saleh (track and Gobi-Gasr Bir el Abid) 30 km. to the east of the positions of the *Ariete*, Gens. Cunningham, Norris and Gott in relationship and almost caught them full with their respective staffs. The commander of the 8th Army was saved by quickly taking off in his plane chased by machine-gun shots, the other two generals were jumping on their vehicles and spun at high speed to the east protected by bursts of the escort.

An episode of the Tobruk garrison reached a town which lies just 15 kilometers away from the vanguards of the British 7th Armored Brigade, the maximum point of penetration, before it was rejected again in the perimeter of the fortress by the Axis troops.

The day of the 23rd was characterized by the order of the DAK moving in an area between the Trigh Capuzzo and Bir Chleta (S.W. of Gambut) to focus and launch a coordinated attack and rational system than those confused and inconclusive unleashed in the past days. The *Ariete* received the order from the CAM to remain watchful waiting overseeing the junction Bir el Gobi-Gabr Saleh with its Re.Co. stationed in the north near El Adem in Trigh Capuzzo, while the *Trieste* was in the 2nd echelon at Bir Hacheim ready to move or to Tobruk or eastward as needed; The ZbV "Afrika" Div. which had changed its name to the 90th Light Div. motorized, was on the front of Tobruk with a support group of army tanks. In the evening Rommel finally clarified his plan to Gen. Bastico: go to the Egyptian border to truncate English logistic lines, then with reverse move westward in the direction of Sidi Rezegh and close with the help of the CAM the entire sector between Trigh Capuzzo and Trigh el Abd: to trap the enemy armored forces that were in the area, including the eastern sector between units of Tobruk and the Italian-German armored units. A bold and reckless maneuver that only a fervent revolutionary mindset could conceive and carryout. But to get the expected result Rommel, also needed CAM detached and independent from the PGA, and in this situation he had no better solution than to take action to Mussolini's German liaison general, sensitized by an urgent request to the Supreme Command that requested and obtained Mussolini 's coveted authorization issued with the following telegram:

SUPREME COMMAND n. 30959/OP. 23 Nov. 1941/XX -Hours 12:15.

For General BASTICO

"It follows from the situation I draw firm conviction that the battle fought in Marmarica must be unitary. I then decided that all Marmarica troops, including therefore Corps of Gambara, pass immediately to General Rommel orders then assume conduct entire action under your command. Into account more than ever on value and tenacity of commanders and soldiers of Italy."

MUSSOLINI.

And in this way the CAM, on which the Supercomando ASI was great expectations as a unique and effective movable tool and of the Italian commands available to maneuver, were transferred to the P.G. Afrika.[109]

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From certain operational points of view, it was more than natural that on the battlefield, faced with the dangers inherent in the enemy offensive, there should be a unified command that could completely dispose of all the means and men available to thwart any threat, neutralize and blunt enemy initiatives, but the German general, who lacked tact and sensitivity, had to take due account of the prerogatives, jealousies and reservations of the Italian commands not accustomed to such methods of behavior and when he did not obtain what he wanted by good means, he asked and obtained from the Supreme Command which sensitized Mussolini appropriately.

Of course the collaboration to be effective was to prove unconditional and free of special mental reservations in common interest of the Axis.

The 24th the DAK began to move eastward, Rommel disappeared after him leaving irritated and free of news the Italian commands, while in time continued with English movements with the support of WDAF who had moved forward on the Sidi Barrani trampoline field where the 272nd Sqdn. again attacked the airfields of Derna, Gazala, Martuba Tmimi and causing destruction and between aircraft and material fires. A first clash between Panzers of the 21st and the Stuart tanks of the 4th Brigade, occurred near Gambut and despite the support provided to armor units armored units by the ASC in connection with the 451st Sqdn. RAAF, the British lost 23 tanks against 2 Mk. III destroyed and another 6 damaged.

Equally important mobile GCI who had moved on the airfields of Marmarica coordinating the activity of the Wings 262nd and 258th present with 8 squadrons of Hurricanes and Tomahawk.

Between 25/26 November in conjunction with Rommel’s counter-maneuver, the WDAF exercised maximum pressure on the Axis employing 6 bomber squadrons, including the French 84th "Lorraine Sqdn." Blenheim and Maryland, two tactical squadrons of P.40 and Beaufighter.

The offensive of DAK did not cause particular results and Rommel decided to return to Marmarica where the chaotic situation persisted even, motioned during the retreat to repeated attacks by fighter/bombers WDAF against panzer and motorized vehicles, especially in the area of El Duda focus of resistance, attacked by 23 P.40 with bombs and machine guns and defended by aircraft of the Fl.Fu. Afrika who suffered eight knockdowns against two by the English.

Also underwent airstrikes the Axis logistic centers in Benghazi, Derna, Benina, Berka while Wellingtons with 38th Sqdn. bombed Naples in order to slow down the current inflow of supplies to Libya.

Also in the English side there were uncertainties, disappointments and doubts to the point that on the 26th Cunningham was replaced by Gen. Ritchie in command of the 8th Army, for having also lost operational control of the employee units during the 5-day offensive in Marmarica. On the 28th Rommel returned his HQ to El Adem discouraged by the failure against the British supply lines, and the next day is made available to provide explanations to the rightful Gen. Bastico although in the meantime units of the New Zealand 2nd Div. had made reunification with Tobruk troops in the village of El Duda, increasing even more the confusion and fragmentation of what was still called improperly battle front, since even British armored units concerned about the return of DAK to Marmarica and sensing the danger of circumvention as proposed by Rommel, were returning quickly to the Egyptian border made target to air strikes of the Axis.

On the day of the 29th, an Italian-German counter-attack in the eastern sector of Tobruk reestablished the situation by restoring the encirclement of the fortress and pushing eastward part of the New Zealand infantry, who became trapped in the defensive perimeter of Tobruk. All, friends and enemies were now exhausted, disheartened, confused by the outcome of the battle that had not generated until then no winners or losers.

Between November 28 and December it had registered more attacks of Wellington on the port of Benghazi and the airfields of El Adem, Acroma, Gazala followed, day by incursions of Maryland, Baltimore, and Boston Blenheim supported by Hurricane and Tomahawk. The release of the first Boston and Baltimore had resulted in the gradual withdrawal of Blenheim mostly with engines out of use for prolonged use of the desert L.G.. A very heavy night attack was also brought to the junction of Lamluda that controlled the pre-gebeliche origins of the slopes el Mechili -Bir Tengeder.[110]

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The heavy wear and tear of the squadrons of the 1st line meant the arrival of two new reserve units: the 208th and 237th Rhodesian aviation of tactical reconnaissance attacking at their onset the Tmimi airport.

On December 3, the 22nd Guards Armored Brigade attacked the junction of Bir el Gobi units of RECAM (Scout unit of the CAM) but was rejected with heavy losses by a Battalion of the Young Volunteers GIL battles firmly and with the valor of veterans. As of December 4 the just the DAK had suffered the following losses: 4,000 killed, 142 tanks (Pz. Mk. II-III-IV), 41 guns, 34 A/T. 50 and 8 88/56,60 mortars, 15 FLAK 20mm machine guns, 10 half-tracks tractors, 724 trucks. The losses of armored vehicles accounted 2/3 of the initial force of the DAK, but the situation could be considered even more worrying for the loss at sea of an entire convoy with armored vehicles and direct supplies to Libya, this event that convinced Mussolini to write the Fuhrer a letter which highlighted the serious transport problem for Libya, the need to use the safer routes to Tunisia and stating that when faced with a monthly requirement of 120,000 tons of supplies after the destruction of a convoy of 7 ships, it had been possible to reach only 40,000 tons to Libya of materials using 100,000 tons of military escorts.

But something was moving positively since the Luftwaffe sent the II Flieger Korps to Italy with Field Marshal Kesselring and General Cavallero gave the news to Supercomando ASI novelty sending Gen. Bastico the dispatch n. 31042/O.P. as follows:

"Commander Marshal Kesselring 2nd Luftflotte has taken on 1 December command of the X CAT pending II CAT arrivals to complete in Sicily. Marshal has given the X CAT following order: begins stop.

1) The X Corps will prevent, with concentration & own shares through constant attacks ordered a retreat of enemy forces. It must reach the goal in a direct agreement with the Italian forces areas that will receive its directives.

2) Equally important task is to isolate Tobruk. Here too cooperation with the Italian forces. For the settlement of this collaboration it will be established in framework & Superaereo agreement, after hearing commander X Air Corps & will then be announced.

3) It once again underlines the decisive action that the air weapon place in this period of struggle. order end. Signed Marshal Albert Kesselring. stop.

In relation to that & the sense of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force please have this command since our Air Force will fully adapt to the above directives that have been agreed between the Marshal Kesselring & Supreme Command. In particular, it emphasizes the need to prevent influx supplies into Tobruk fort. This condition is essential to achieve at any cost. stop. Cavallero."

Meanwhile Rommel's maneuver to try to surround the British armored forces in Marmarica relying on the help of the CAM, was coming to the conclusion with pliers that was closing in Bir el Gobi area where the *Ariete* had to be the right wing of the winding.

Unfortunately things did not go in the direction predicted by Rommel for a number of setbacks: the death of Gen. Neumann-Sylkow commanding the 15th Panzer Div., the capture of Gen. von Ravenstein commander of the 21st Panzer, the serious delay in the CAM moving to block the retreat of the British did fail in this opportunity and the British bolted eastward filtering through a gap left vacant by the pincer just a few kilometers with severe disappointment to Rommel who took him with the CAM commander, responsible in his opinion of failure of the maneuver of encirclement, of insubordination, of preconceived reservations about the PGA, who fails to cooperate.

There was nothing left to do now that the situation had somewhat clarified well ahead of the two sides, which collect the immense desert the remains of Panzer Gruppe Afrika and retire west on a new defensive line.

This sudden decision to Rommel was not shared by the Italian command and there was bitter dissension and violent arguments between Gen. Rommel and Bastico on whether or not to abandon the siege of Tobruk and retire on the expected line of Ain el Gazala. Insubordination Rommel was none other than the German answer to the General Bastico, as opposed to the same attitude from Gambara.

Rommel, however, stubbornly wanted to maintain his point of view on the matter by withdrawing, on his own initiative and thanks to his prerogatives as operational commander of the eastern sector, the troops deployed on the eastern perimeter of Tobruk and in this way from 5 December the fortress was automatically unlocked at the eastern gate and the long siege ended to the surprise of the English.[111]

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Not satisfied with even this measure, in a service meeting that took place on the evening of the 5th, Rommel also mentioned the possibility of a general retreat to Tripolitania for fear of exposing themselves to a danger of circumvention from the south by the gebelico towards Ajdabiya and become the scapegoat of a Bede Fomm number two, with all the psychological, propaganda and prestige that this hypothesis meant for his position of commander of the Axis and the Reich.

The found and favorable opportunities to abandon Cyrenaica was quickly exploited by Gen. Ritchie, already perplexed by the sudden abandonment of the eastern Tobruk positions, which rearranged his proven units, reinforced with fresh units from Egypt arrived, completed expeditiously organic two units of the ranks and overturning a situation that seems uncertain and nebulous, compromised and confused, re-launched the offensive westward the 8th Army cleverly taking advantage of the Axis difficulties.

Between November 18 and early December the Fl.Fu. Afrika had been reinforced by the III/St. G.3 and a Staffel of the II/JG.53 needed to revitalize the tried units, who had continuously attacked in the course of two weeks concentrations enemies and in the first days of December front- between Ras el Arid, Taibel Salem, Taieb el Asem.

In the southern desert Oasis Force had progressed in his tormented march on the route traced by LRDG, subjected to repeated attacks by bombers and fighter Axis and particularly Italian, losing dozens of vehicles on the slopes before reaching Augila evacuated by the local garrison and directing to Gialo that pitted greater resistance nipped after providing two new airstrips between parallel 22º/23º, used profitably by WDAF with the 270th Wing units.

On December 5, occurred a violent aerial combat in the sky of El Adem between Ju.87 escorted by Bf.109 and G.50 against Curtiss P.40. According to British news source were shot down at least 15 Junkers, 1 Messerschmitt, 2 Fiat and 1 Macchi but in reality the Italian-German losses were much lower and merely 6 Ju.87 (two of which were Italian) killed by A/A shooting against the felling also validated by the English, the 5 P .40 of squadrons 112th and 250th as well as a Blenheilm of the "Lorraine" shot down by a Bf.109 of JG.53.

The next day another Messerschmitt repeated the success torching a Beaufighter on Tmimi sky but WDAF than compensated the loss by destroying flying a Bf.110 of ZG.26 carrying the commander of the III Group Major Kaschka.

Had begun in the meantime the retreat of the P.G. Afrika from Marmarica and the hasty decision to Rommel meant the loss of much of the technical equipment of the Luftwaffe on Ain el Gazala and Derna airfields, belonging to JG.27 and ZG.26, were among other fuel-free ignited prematurely before recovery with convoys. It was necessary to hastily organize an airlift between Cyrenaica and Crete with Ju.52 to provide Fl.Fu. Afrika gasoline required to operate and move.

The WDAF attacked several times the fields around Derna and the RAF was bombing the Maleme and Iraklion airport which took off from the three-engined transport direct to El Fteiah intercepted during the flight by the Beaufighter of 272nd Sqdn. and Maryland thwarted by Bf.110, while it was being implemented the expedient of flying above the water the Ju.52 suitably camouflaged with green/black/blue to confuse them with the sea surface. At the same time the strategic air force intensified raids on Libya's airports suffered the following damage: Castelbenito - 5 Italian aircraft destroyed and seven others damaged; Derna - 1 Italian aircraft and five Germans destroyed (11 others damaged); Tmimi -2 German planes destroyed and 10 damaged (incursion of 10 December 1941).

December 10 began with the Boston bombers of 24th Sqdn. who attacked an airport near Gazala losing 5 twin-engine culled by the Bf.109s protecting the airfield. On the 12th new combat between Messerschmitt "Fritz" of JG. 53 and Hurricane of 94th with the loss of four English fighters while another 4 Hurricane/Tomahawk were destroyed by anti-aircraft fire near Martuba and another 3 above Mechili intercepted by Bf.l09/F.[112]

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To intensify the clearing operations of Cyrenaica the X CAT was offering to Gen. Frohlich 15 Ju.52 that were assigned to El Fteiah.

In the night on December 15 came into action LRDG attacking the Tamet airfield to over 800 km from the Axis lines destroying 1 Cant.1007, 1 SM.79, 2 Ca.309, 1 CR.42 mining in addition to the Balbia West of Sirte.

The LRDG units came from Giofra where it worked with about twenty other motorized detachments in the Italian rear. The 20th was the turn of Barce where they went lost four aircraft while the security departments of the field repelled an attack by English friendly Arab elements. The 22nd Wadi Tamet was again to be visited by LRDG with even more serious damage: 3 Ju.87, 3 CR.42, 1 MC.200 of R.A. and 4 German Stukas were the budget of the heavy night-destruction which was still to be added the attack resulted in Ajdabiya, where 24 planes were destroyed: 8 CR.42, 6 MC.200, 5 G.50, 2 Ca.311, 2 Ca.164. In one night 35 Axis planes had been lost at the hands of a handful of daring commandos!

Continued the retreat of the Axis on the roads of Cyrenaica subjected to heavy air raids by the WDAF. The tragic balance sheet of the 16th when a column of Bersaglieri of the Ariete in transit in the area Mechili was mistakenly attacked by Stukas that killed or wounded hundreds of Italian soldiers, including the division commander Gen. Piazzoni, deceived probably by the captured trucks used by Bersaglieri and artillerymen but had exhibited recognition towels, nationality insignia and fired rockets and smoke optical signaling. The CAM command made Rommel a strong protest over the incident entirely unjustified.

A few days later the British reconnaissance reported the presence in the field of El Magrum of a strong concentration of Axis fighter planes and Gen. Ritchie agree with Gen. Cunningham decided to foil the potential threat pushing back the Italian- German deployment as westernmost possible sending an armored column through the Jebel Achadar in an attempt to repeat another Beda Fomm; simultaneously a large formation of P.40 from three squadrons attacked El Magrum on the 22nd destroying 5 Ju.87, 4 Ju.52, 1 Bf.109, 1 Mc.202, 1 Ju.88, 1 Do.17: 13 aircraft lost in a few minutes of hellish bombardment/strafing. In the night a subsequent bombing caused further destruction, followed the next morning with a series of raids on the airfields of Benina, Berka, Barce, Ain el Gazala, Derna. Were lost 13 Italian fighter planes between G.50, CR.42, MC.200.

The 19th was vacated the largest airport of El Fteiah of Derna remained to the last in activities to allow the airlift with Crete, with the result that came to miss the early warning of the airfield evacuation to a group of Ju.52 in flight from Crete who were greeted upon landing by a thick roll of automatic weapons of the Indian infantry had occupied the land for aviation and set fire to some three-engined while others, albeit affected, could take off again and back to Maleme.

In the stages of retreat Rommel asked the Fl.Fu. Afrika maximum cooperation to protect the P.G.A. and Gen. Frohlich intensified attacks on Sidi Barrani/Marsa Matruk, missions on L.G. desert hoping to find flight activities, in many cases found, dive bombing on mechanized columns and supplies between Bu Hamar/Sidi Omar, strafing the roads and tracks of Marmarica between Sidi Rezegh, Capuzzo, Gambut, Gabr Saleh, Bir el Hamarin, Trigh el Abd and Oasis Force attacked heavily in the village of Wadi el Hamin (100 km west of Ajdabiya) limit this very disturbing to a potential threat from the south in the Gulf Sirtica and also strafing of motorized columns Hacheim Bir/Bir el Gobi flowing back westbound.

On December 25 was evacuated Benghazi airport on which the British accessed the presence of 64 Axis planes destroyed or sabotaged in only one field of Benina, many of which, however, useless for previous damage or otherwise of no practical use.

Among those discouraging news came unexpected but position like, the confirmation of the sinking of battleships "Queen Elisabeth" and "Valiant" in the port of Alexandria the Mediterranean Fleet, attacked in the night on December 19 by a handful of brave and bold Italian sailors with explosive charges had been able to do alone, that on several occasions it was not possible to armored ships, cruisers, bombers and torpedo planes: to inflict hard and decisive blow to the British Navy in the Mediterranean![113]

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The event opened new large Axis strategic possibilities as to start from 1942 Royal Navy no longer had in the Mediterranean, battleships or aircraft carriers swept away relentlessly from the Navy and Axis aviation.

Malta did not seem to resent the effect of the new situation after the semi-destruction of Force K stumbled into a minefield Italian, for it continued with stubborn obstinacy to hunt convoys with submarines and aircraft causing new sinking and painful losses.

On December 29, in a new letter from Mussolini to Hitler, Mussolini described the end through exhaustion of the "Crusader" ended without defeat or winners, stating among other things that the loss of a convoy of four ships carrying hundreds of Panzer and M.13 tanks had jeopardized the outcome of the struggle in Cyrenaica and only with massive use of the Battle Fleet had it been possible to arrive in Libya essential supplies.

THE 5th AIR FLEET DURING "CRUSADER"

On the eve of the English offensive the 5th Air Fleet of Libya had exceeded by a few days the command crisis with the advent in command of G.U.A. Gen. S.A. Vittorio Marchesi which had replaced Gen. Ajmone Cat as of 6 November.

The structure of the fleet had not, however, affected by specific shocks and remained essentially unchanged in its various phases with three operating segments: West (Gen. Raoul da Barberino), East (Gen. Ferdinand Raffaelli) and Center (Gen. Wenceslas D'Aurelio). The only change concerned the turnover of two field commanders replaced by Gen. B.A. Raffaelli and D'Aurelio few weeks earlier.

The early volumes of an impending general offensive English had manifested on several occasions because of the many raids carried out on the ports, airports, logistic warehouses; with an increase in the activity of aviation against the WDAF intended to block the tactical reconnaissance of the axis to avoid the sighting of the advanced units and the large number of vehicles transferred to the west near the Libyan border; with a disruptive activities carried out by dropping paratroopers, landings saboteurs, commando raids in the rear; with an intensified radio activity and identification by the new mechanized units and infantry units.

The general concepts adopted by the 5th Air Fleet command foresaw an advanced deployment of units in order to effectively support the actions of ground units of P.G.A. and C.A.M. and also the establishment of fuel depots, explosives and ammunition capable of ensuring in any eventuality an operating autonomy of at least a week.[114]

A twin-engine Ca. 313 of the 64th OA Group. The presence of outdated Ro 37 biplanes was gradually replaced in Libya by the most modern and capable twin-engine Caproni.

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The British attack did not therefore generate any particular reasons for surprise in the Italian commands except to the extent foreseen by the previous symptoms and in the identification of the established day, since the air reconnaissance had reported for several days the British concentrations close to the border, their progressive numerical increase, the advanced locations and the gradual movements of the individual units with a capillary and valuable work such as to provide the ASI Supercommand with the possibility of chronologically informing the Supreme Command of the situation (November 17 had been reported to Rome over 3,000 motor vehicles sighted in the area Sidi Barrani/Marsa Matruk) while the part relating specifically to the WDAF the SIA comforted by the SIM information did ascend to no less than 16/20 the fighter squadrons, just as many tactical support and bombardment units, and a dozen tactical reconnaissance, heavy fighter and torpedo planes, divided between the Western Desert Air Force, the arrears RAF groups 201st and 205th and those of reserve and garrison located in Palestine, Iraq, Aden, East Africa; an evaluation by default because the squadrons of the RAF/ME added up to 54 organic units of flight and air support to the "Crusaders" will initially were assigned 31. According to the organic RAF were available so no less than a thousand aircraft to excluding those spare and repair.

The frantic enemy activity on land and in the heaven was exactly interpreted by the 5th Air Fleet Command as an imminent attack and sign the relevant claim made by aviation command to Supercomando ASI obtained as a natural answer the following general guidelines:

1) maintain the unit forward deployment;

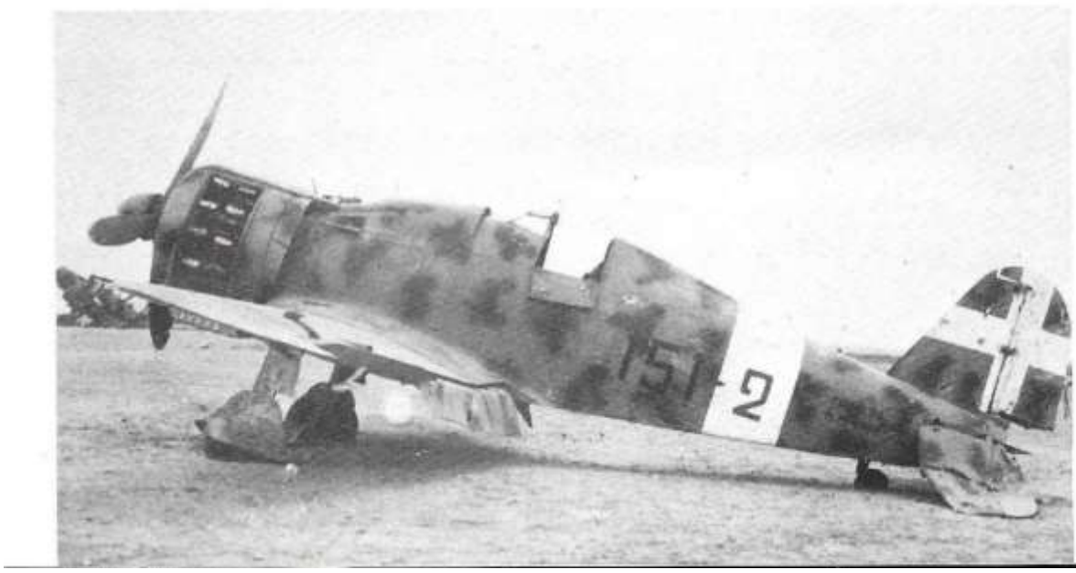
2) maintain fuel supplied at least for at least 5 days of autonomy.

Measures were only partly justified by the situation, because the units stay on advanced fields would expose the staff and the flight material sudden offense of the enemy. Such an eventuality could not find another solution, however, given the shortage of vehicles available to the R.A./Libya and fuel shortages: two elements that prevented the implementation of the RAF method of arrears equipped airfields and those advanced trampoline proved good in many respects.

The fuel shortages severely limited the offensive activities and the only possible activity and indispensable concerned the strategic reconnaissance, tactical observation, surveillance desert, the offensive exploration in the sea with the "torpedo bombers.

The advanced autumn season had aggravated even more the situation of the airfields, many of which were flooded and impassable to the point of preventing take-offs and regular maintenance and refueling with common vehicles.[115]

Sidi Rezegh - A G50 Bis of 20th Group CT surprised by British tank crews on the airfield and put out of action by bursts of machine gun - to the left glimpsed the carcass of a Ca 133



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On the battlefield of Marmarica the German meeting masters Kesselring, Froelich, Gause Chief of Staff of the DAK, Rommel commander of DAK. The fortunes and prestige of the Werhmacht were endangered by the British offensive.

Compared to the situation existing in the same period on the eve of 1940, there had been a clear improvement in the anti-aircraft defense of the camps with the assignment of numerous 20 mm batteries, a more fruitful general defensive experience, a modest and positive increase in the provision of transport and technical vehicles, but for the rest there had been no substantial innovations and what the war in the desert had taught - in the course of two campaigns - did not always allow for the achievement of better results due to the lack of suitable and sufficient means. The airfields were poorly manned and defenseless, and therefore vulnerable to dangerous perimeter attacks with tanks and motorized vehicles, lacked mobile units for intervention, equipment and defensive weapons, suitable shelters for airplanes and staff. Were also frequent interruptions due to sabotage of the Arabs recruited by the British (in the constitution in Egypt was a Libyan Arab Force formed with Libyan Senussi and exiles), the military courts had handed down several death sentences for murder, violence, hostile acts committed against Italian civilians and Axis Armed Forces, and it had been set up an internment camp for Arab facilitators for the British in Sidi Abdul Kerim (Tagiura).

It was a difficult situation and in many respects irreversible, but not enough to deceive many superficial onlookers a glimpse of history and optimistic of winning results without objectively considering the difficulties in North Africa, where an army of about 300,000 men between Italian and German, had live and fight a costly war dramatically tied the slender thread of supplies from Italy, whose tenuous umbilical cord whenever it was cut by the enemy -both even momentarily - inevitably put in crisis Rommel's army.

Opposed to this situation lived and fought the British Army, a viable entity representative of one of the largest and most powerful nations of the world, politically connected, militarily and economically to the United States of America, the world's most powerful industrial nation, connected its rich colonial empire of raw materials, food, and defending human potential in the Middle East of some essential strategic resources, including oil, controlled and monitored at source, in Iran and Iraq, with an annual production totaling 12 million tons, which was to be added to Bahrain in the Persian Gulf (1,000,000 tons per year).

In contrast to such a great wealth of raw materials and war potential, it was a surprising paradox that in Libya the Italian Air Force could not fly its planes as it should due to a lack of fuel, could not, without wanting to, implement the necessary safety measures for the material and physical protection of the personnel due to a shortage of vehicles, had to ration, forced to operate and cooperate with difficult and haughty allies like the Germans, so parsimonious with aid, obey and coexist with absolutist and intractable commanders like Rommel, make its personnel live in the squalid desolation of desert camps devoid of the most basic comforts, without offering anything in return other than the dedication and spirit of sacrifice of the aviators, the sense of duty, obedience to orders received. To further aggravate the situation, there was the replacement of General Pricolo who had long been in open conflict with General Cavallero.

In these difficult moral and material conditions, the 5th Air Fleet of Libya began its second defensive battle to defend Cyrenaica and fight as much as possible, the fiercest opponent. Before the beginning of the attack the WDAF suddenly bombed the evening of the 18th the airfield of Ain el Gazala destroying 10 G.50, 2 CR. 42 and a MC.200. It suffered a serious loss even before it began the "Crusader".

The first day of battle - 19 November - was even more disastrous for the Italian Air Force since the 20th CT Group was almost completely destroyed, surprised on the Sidi Rezegh field by British armoured forces that had penetrated into Marmarica through the Trigh Capuzzo, in an area that had been entrusted to the surveillance of the DAK but which was mysteriously left unguarded by the 33rd Reconnaissance Bn. forward deployed on the Dahar er Reghem.[116]

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The 20th Group CT (Lt. Col. Mario Bonzano) with Sqd. 151st, 352nd, 353rd, located on the Martuba field, had been ordered by the Eastern Sector Command to move on the trampoline airfield Sidi Rezegh east of El Adem, to stock up, and then provide the escort of two SM.79 scouts posted by the 174th Sqd. RST, which were to take off from Martuba to be "join" on the vertical of El Adem by the G.50 escort and then bring in the border area between Bir Khamsa and fort Maddalena to control the situation.

They took part in the mission 22 Fiat G.50 of the 35 equipping the unit, accompanied by a group of specialists on board 2 logistic Ca.133.

At 13:30 all the 24 aircraft had arrived in time on the airport of Sidi Rezegh, where they were decentralized and intending to resupply with the help of airfield staff and the care of the unit specialists for the development of engines and weapons. At about 16:00 they broke suddenly on the field a few Curtiss P.40 that machine-gunned hastily decentralized aircraft over the vast desert rectangle damaging a dozen and burning one that was destroyed. It was a moment of understandable confusion but also the immediate control of the situation that the commander Bonzano picked up doing a quick check on the conditions of men and those of the planes techniques, trying to recover as soon scattered to the sides of the field specialists and ordering the immediate take-off of efficient G.50. A few minutes later, while there was intense preparations appeared on the south side of the field a group of Humber armored cars and light “Stuart” tanks of the 7th Arm. Brigade, arrived unnoticed in the area. These vehicles after a brief moment of hesitation due to the unusual opportunities began to shoot with guns and automatic weapons on aircraft recognized for Italian while armored cars were brought quickly on the south-western perimeter of the field by shooting bursts of machine gun wildly into aircraft and personnel of the 20th Group.

In general and understandable the confusion with the sudden attack, they managed to take off only 3 planes and a couple of trucks quickly gathered the largest number of pilots and specialists including even the commander of the group, then taking the maximum speed on the north side of the field still free in the direction of El Adem, facilitated the escape by the 3 now flying G.50 beginning to strafe the enemy tanks.[117]

To ascertain the serious crisis in N.A. Gen Cavallero arrives in Libya taking over from Gen. Bastico and Gen. Barbasetti. Behind him come at a constant three-engined SM 82 transport with airlift of reinforcements of men and materials.

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Young fascists of the CAM station at Bir el Gobi with an 47/32 antitank - These young volunteers they provided in the "Crusader" an excellent example of courage and firmness of veterans.

The armoured cars directed the bursts of their guns onto the tailplanes to disable the Italian fighters, 18 of which were stranded on the field together with the 2 Capronis that were on fire and the G.50 that had already been destroyed in the air attack. They captured 80 prisoners, including 8 pilots and specialists from the 20th Fighter Group, and among them Capt. Del Prete, commander of the 151st Sqd., seven of whom managed to escape from captivity a few days later when the Pz. Gr. Afrika reconquered Sidi Rezegh and Sidi Azeis. In just two days before the start of the offensive enemy, they had been destroyed 34 aircraft including 29 Fiat G.50; the 20th Group had been severely decimated. As the Italian-German tactical air force was devoted to attacks against armored formations in Marmarica escorted by fighters, bombers - SM.79 part of the 8th Stormo BT and BR.20 of the 13th Stormo were sent to the south Oasis to hinder of advanced Force that Giarabub and Cufra tried to point toward Gialo with strong motorized column of 500 vehicles.

The bombers attacked the convoy on several occasions inflicting heavy losses to vehicles with repeated machine guns and small-caliber AR type bombs. They were lost 2 BR.20 hit by anti-aircraft guns defending the march of the vehicles.

After several days of forced stop due to flooding of the fields, even employees air units from Central Sector took off to integrate squadrons already committed some time.

The evolution of the military situation forced the end of the month the abandonment of the fields to the west of Tobruk and to Gialo threatened closely by the advance of Oasis Force, now in about 300 km. by Agedabia after traveling for 10 days over 600 km of desert trails. Attacks CR.42 B.A. the 376th Sqd. (Capt. I. Lalatta) were brought against British armored vehicles in the El Cuasc area, east of Gambut and Sidi Rezegh area, working for several consecutive days with takeoffs from the airfields of Ain el Gazala frequently subjected to the enemy fighter attacks . To reinforce the few Italian attackers came the 236th assault Sqd. (Capt. A. Cerutti) with CR.42 B.A. (Wing bombs) who had left the Ju.87 survivors of the 209th Sqd. to pass on the biplane Fiat equipped as a assault.

The Armed Forces High Command ASI urged on several occasions the Supreme Command to send reinforcements and aircraft Chief of SMG course was pressuring the Superaereo cause was strengthened adequately the North African front is vital for Italy.

In particular called for the prompt transfer under the CT Wing Libya equipped with the brand new Macchi C.202 long been assigned to the units. On November 18, a first group of the 71st Sqd. Mc.202 (17th Group) now to move to the African use with AS filters, it moved from Ciampino to Comiso (Sicily) waiting to take in Libya as soon as received the transfer order.

From Sicily it moved to Tripoli, the reconstituted 239th Sqd. B.a.T. (Capt. R. Piovano) while in Castel Benito you were completing the 209th sorely tried by the vicissitudes suffered and war, now entrusted to the command of Capt. Ragazzini. On November 23, landed in Castel Benito the first Mc.202 of the CT Stormo from Comiso and in the same day after a summary and control its supply, off again for the field of Wadi Tamet used as a springboard for technical operational area east and later they were moved to Benina and Martuba after the airfield undergoing a flare drop and a warm welcome from the RAF that fortunately caused no harm to people and to the flying material. For the first time since the war began the 1st Stormo CT operated in North Africa with new and more powerful aircraft, the day of the 25th began with the combat in the area of Sidi Rezegh/Gambut finally managing to prevail on this fierce enemy with Hurricane and Tomahawk, 4 of which were considered shot downed at the end of a long and difficult confrontation in the sky of Marmarica.[118]

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Operation "Crusader"
(18 November 1941/10 January 1942)

With the approach of the fall season in North Africa, began to mature the most favorable period for climatic and environmental conditions to undertake new offensives initiatives.

It was because they were preparing for a long time the Axis on one side and the English on the other, accumulating stocks of materials, revitalize combat units, strengthening the workforce with other units, preparing the logistics organization, technique and the related services.

Some changes occurred at the command summit with replacements, alternations and changes necessary for a better functioning at every level.

The turnover in command of the 5th Air Fleet of Gen. Marchesi, the assigned responsibilities through directives to Gen. Rommel and the master of the Fl.Fu. Afrika Gen. Frohlich for the sector to the east of the Ain el Gazala meridian, the constitution in Italy of the O.B.S. (Ober Befehlshaber Sud) command-in-chief for the south entrusted to Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, which occurred in November 1941 to coincide with the organic strengthening of the Luftwaffe in the Mediterranean.

The operational period of stasis replaced on the Russian front with the arrival of the winter season, had allowed him to transfer to the Italian front the II Flieger Korps (Gen. Bruno Loerzer) that in addition to the existing X Pl. Kps. of General Hans Geisler and the Fl.Fu. Afrika was the organic makeup of the 2nd Luftflotte of which Kesselring was the proprietor commander.

Remaining in North Africa the operating segment, the Fl.Fu. Afrika was strengthened with new units and early November it appeared thus:

Bombing
III/LG.l of Ju.88
I/St.G.l of Ju.87
II/St.G.2 of Ju.87
I/St.G.3 of Ju.87
Fighters
I-II-III/JG.27 of Bf.109
III/JG.S3 of Bf.109
2nd Staf.I/NJG.2 of J u.88
3rd/7th/8th Staf.III/ZG.26 of Bf.110

A total of 190 aircraft of which 120 war efficient including: a bomber group, three Stukas, four fighters, four Sqd. including destroyers, and night fighters.

The 5th Air Fleet was also strengthened with the sending to Libya of multi-engine BT aircraft and fighters intended to replace the losses and for wear and tear suffered by the units during the long months of war in the desert.[119]

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As of 18 Nov. 1941 the 5th Air Fleet Libya presented itself thus:

West Sector Command

98th BT Gr. (Sqd. 241st/240th)	of BR.20	(Lt. Col. I. De Wittembeschi)	Castel Benito
236th Sqd. Aut. BaT	of Ju.87	(Capt. G. Santinoni)	Castel Benito
175th Sqd. RST	of SM.79	(Capt. R. Cantarella)	Castel Benito
3rd Gr. Aut. CT (Sqd. 153rd/154th/155th)	of CR.42	(Maj. G. Pugnali)	Sorman/Misurata
12th Gr. Aut. CT (Sqd. 160th/165th/159th)	of G.50	(Maj. B. Cudugnello)	Castel Benito
17th Gr. Aut. CT (Sqd. 71st/72nd/80th)	of MC.202	(assigned to N.A. departing from Campoformido)	
157th Gr. Aut. CT (Sqd. 384th /385th /357th)	of MC.200	(assigned to N.A. departing from Ciampino)	
145th Gr. Aut. T (Sqd. 600th/604th/610th)	SM.75/SM.74/SM.82	(Lt. Col. F. Mazzetti)	Castel Benito
Sec. C.N.	of CR.42		Mellaha

A total of 145 airplanes of the first line of which 101 are efficient.

Central Sector Command

160th Gr. Aut. CT (Sqd. 394th /375th /393rd)	of CR.42	(Lt. Col. F. Zanni)	Benghazi /Benina
360th Sqd. (155th Gr. Aut. CT)	of G.50	(Capt. G. Cavalieri)	Benghazi /Benina
174th Sqd. RST	of SM.79	(Capt. F. Ronzi)	Berka
239th Sqd. B.a.T.	of Ju.87	(Capt. G. Cenni)	Benghazi /Benina
244thSqd. Aut. RS	of SM.81	(Capt. E. Iaccone, then Cap. V. Brescianini)	Benghazi/Benina
Sec. C.N.	of CR.42		

Available 82 aircraft of which 54 are efficient.

East Sector Command

8th St. BT.-27th Gr. (Sqd. 18th/52nd)	of SM.79	(Lt. Col. E. Mazzola)	Martuba
28th Gr. BT (Sqd. 10th)	of SM.79	(Maj. M. Bianchini)	Martuba
13th St. BT. -11th Gr. (Sqd. 1st/4th)	of BR.20	(Lt. Col. G. Aini)	Barce
43rd Gr. BT. (Sqd.3rd/5th)	of BR.20	(Lt. Col. P. Pagliocchini)	Derna
209th Sqd. BaT.	of Ju.87	(Capt. G. Zanazzo)	Derna
20th Gr. Aut. CT. (Sqd. 352nd /353rd/151st)	of G.50	(Lt. Col. M. Bonzano)	Martuba
155th Gr. Aut. CT. (Sqd. 378th/ 351st)	of G.50	(Maj. L. Bianchi)	Ain el Gazala
19th Sqd. RS. (28th Gr. BT)	on SM.79	(Capt. G. La Penna)	Derna
376th Sqd. Aut. CT	on CR.42 B.A.	(Capt. I. Lalatta)	Ain el Gazala
279th Sqd. Aut. AS	of SM.79	(Capt. Giulio Marini)	Derna

R. A. Aviation for Libya (Lt. Col. Giovanni Rocco)

15th Gr. OA (Sqd. 125th/ 32nd)	of Ca.311	(Maj. Bruno Cerne)	Agedabia/ Benghazi
67th Gr. OA (Sqd. 129th /132nd)	of Ro.37/ Ca.311	(Capt. G. Minervino)	Ain el Gazala/ Benghazi
69th Gr. OA (Sqd. 118th/123rd)	of Ca.311	(Maj. Hector Zambaldi)	Zuara[120]

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Aviation R.M. for Libya (Lt. Col. Camillo Gentile)

145th Sqd. RM	of Cant.501	(Capt. N. Albanesi)	Pisida
196th Sqd. RM	of Cant.501	(Capt. Massimo Giovannozzi)	Menelaus /Benghazi
Sec. Relief	of Cant.506	(Lt., Gaetano Mastrodicasa)	Benghazi

214 aircraft available which of 146 war efficient.

Colonial garrison aviation

1st and 2nd Group APC - Sahara Air Bn. (Ca.309 -CR.42 -SM.81)

Divided by the 5th Air Fleet Integrated specialties from Esercitavia [Army] and Marinavia [Navy] units and excluding auxiliary aircraft (transport, links, training) included:

Bombers / Dive bombers	n. 83 (51 Eff)
torpedo bombers	n. 5 (4 Eff.)
R.S. T .	n. 26 (15 Eff.)
Fighters.	N. 259 (193 Eff.)
Maritime reconnaissance	n. 16 (11 Eff.)
The aerial observation	n. 52 (30 Eff.)
TOTAL	n. 441 airplanes of which 304 efficient.

The most important change was made from the organic allocation in the 5th Air Fleet of the 17th Group Aut. CT equipped with the new Macchi C.202 that by early November had been stationed in south Ciampino waiting to move to Libya. Numerous units available to the 5th Air Fleet: 13 Squadrons of bombers/torpedo planes, 16 fighter, 12 reconnaissance / exploration should not mislead since the organic texture was somewhat reduced, and the efficiency of the units was around on average 40 -45% of the force available.

SUPPORT OF THE WDAF TO THE WAR OPERATIONS

The failed operations "Brevity" and "Battle Axe" made by the 8th Army on the Libyan-Egyptian border, constituted for thought for the War Office, and in July the Air Marshall Tedder was summoned to London for talks with top leaders the British government.

It was taken into account the situation in the western desert and the national defense commission expressed its concern point of view of the survey results and the methods used in tactical support to Army troops, calling for new directions in view of recovery based on the “Crusader" offensive, the operation scheduled for November set on achieving two fundamental objectives:

1) re-conquest of Cyrenaica;

2) conquest of Tripolitania.

The main task that was assigned to the WDAF contemplated the destruction of the Axis armored forces that made up in the hands of Rommel the gravest danger to the 8th Army.

To fulfill this task, the WDAF would receive adequate reinforcements and flight material suitable to complete by the end of November, the new tactical and operational organization.

The FAA would have also received new planes to strengthen the units embarked on the M.F. and those based on land, whose participation was coordinated in a new operational group - 201st -which should have cooperate with the RAF/ME and with WDAF.

It was also planned an intensive training cycle on the new flight material, new tactical methods designed and programmed effectively for fighters, fighter/bombers, light bombers, tactical reconnaissance and support and combat aircraft (FAA, NF, RF, AS).[121]

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The new cycle has essentially consisted of setting a different mentality and a more congenial employment to transform WDAF in a unit with great flexibility and mobility with wide autonomy, which was to liberate it from the methods used in the past now considered no longer suitable to the evolution of the air war applied specifically in the western desert.

On September 5, the Imperial G.S. sent to Q.G. Cairo for the Middle East plans for "Crusader" in conjunction with a strengthening of advanced AA defense strengthened by 250 automatic cannons Bofors 40 for added defensive autonomy of terrestrial units that had greatly liberate WDAF of the tasks of defending the approach.

The strengthening of the RAF/ME according to schedule from Imperial G.S. agree with the Joint Staff of the RAF, it would have seen an increase in squadrons of various specialties from 34 units to 40 in late October, but increased the workforce to 50 squadrons to the end of December 1941, with the set 1st line of 900 aircraft including fighters, fighter/bombers, tactical reconnaissance, light and medium bombers, photo/strategic reconnaissance.

Aviation for the Navy would be increased from 8 to 12 Sqdns. The total number of aircraft in the Middle East, first in 1046 units (October), to 1262 (December). Also other Beaufighter heavy fighters would be assigned for tactical missions and nighttime offensive long-range, Beaufort torpedo bombers intended primarily to Malta. For the logistic support were assigned four transport squadrons.

The Hurricane MK I aircraft would be gradually replaced with the MK II version; for night interception with Beaufighter equipped with A.I. It would be made up of an ad hoc G.C.I. (Ground Control Interceptor) which was coordinating the defense area of the canal and obstruct the night raids of the Luftwaffe of Crete. Also boosted the Coastal Command with men and new aircraft including the Martin Baltimore (A.30) in place of the Maryland. The poor production of Blenheim was complemented by L.L.A. assignments new twin-engine Douglas Boston while the II MK version of the Wellington would have replaced the previous MK.I.

To facilitate navigation and the Ferry/Service between Takoradi and the Canal, the US would be provided to the RAF transport units the twin-engine Douglas C.47 that the British christened "Dakota". The increase in the number of aircraft supplied to the RAF/ME with the exception of Malta, recorded 549 aircraft in June, 722 in August, 780 in October. Also increasing the actual trained in the Middle East from England, Iraq, Rhodesia, South Africa and Australia, while in Canada proceeded rapidly the Inter-organization of aviation education, which was to provide fully for all the needs of Commonwealth.

In Egypt they were made the first O.T.U. (Operational Training Unit) for the operational training unit, which with an additional instruction quarterly cycle had to strengthen the core of the old pilots of Western Desert Air Force in late 1941 was reduced to only 80 men.

The expansion program of the RAF/ME contemplated for 1942 an increase of 35,000 men for the 62 Squadrons and the expected 5 O.T.U. instructional up to a total of 65,000 to bring the actual 85,000 men established by Tedder program although this credit line was deemed excessive by Churchill and resized to a workforce of 1,000 men per squadron of the 1st line (16 aircraft + 2 spare) airmen including 7,000 men used to Takoradi-Canal ferry service, the 6,500 specialists for broadcasting, the 3,700 workers for sighting services and radar-guided fighter coordination.

The Air Marshall Tedder disagree pleaded with the Prime Minister's thoughts and obtained an additional increase of 4,500 officers and 64,700 specialists to be added to the establishment plan to the RAF/ME.

The technical and logistical organization in the new aviation restructuring for the Middle East, under the responsibility of Vice Air Marshall Dawson, comprised the main workshops of aero-nautical repairs (BSD -Base Salvage Depot) n. 103 (Aboukir)), no. 102 (Abu Sweir), n. 107 (Kasfareet), n. 101 (Massara) intended for the embarked armaments.

The identification and the attack by the Axis on B.S.D. n. 102 and 103 advised the shift to Heliopolis of aviation engines section to preserve the substantial body of new air strikes, which caused between Abu Sweir Aboukir and the destruction of facilities and 26 aircraft under repair with damage to another 49. The motors aviation lost were 40 types of the radial engines together with much valuable technical equipment.[122]

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It was also necessary to decentralize the A.S.P. (Air Storage Park) from Abu Sweir to Boulac to preserve the special parts for planes and an extra deposit was implanted in Massara (M.U.S.D. -maintenance Unit Storage Depot n. 111).

The BOAC aircraft workshops Heliopolis added an invaluable contribution to the repairs and maintenance service, especially with the Helvan Section for Hurricanes and Tomahawks.

For airplanes removed from England and the USA was implanted in Port Sudan a large assembly hall and the staff of the groups 203rd (Sudan) and 207th (East Africa) which is no longer operational after the end of military operations in E.A., was used to transform into repair units and training the two groups which benefited the bases and former Italian bases of Gura and Addis Ababa, where they were conveyed with the Ferry system, hundreds of aircraft came from the Middle East.

The new structure given to WDAF included: 204th Group (V. Air Marshall Coningham and 202nd (Commodore Elmhirst) that had absorbed men and dissolved commands means respectively: H.Q. RAF/ME and Air HQ. Egypt.

The ordering of the Royal Air Force saw as the basic unit Squadron (16 aircraft + 2 spare) divided into 4 sections with the colors red, green, yellow, white. More squadrons formed the Wing (at the level of the Stormo) and more Wings formed the Group (a Brigade level), formed the most Groups, Command.

In addition to the tactical field Sections were operating the Flight (2 sections) and generally the whole squadrons. In support of WDAF to use but with autonomous functions and addiction RAF Middle East Command, was operating 205th Group (Commodore L.L. Mac Lean) with 5 Sqdns. Wellingtons, 201st Group for naval cooperation (Commodore LH Slater) intended for mixed use, 206th Group maintenance/repairs (Commodore CB Cooke) and the predominantly tactical ground support the 253rd Wing autonomous, which was to represent a likeness of what the Luftwaffe did with its LG (Lehr Geschwader), the experimental use units for studies and experiences tactics according to the new doctrine called "tactical air support" meant to be generalized to the entire WDAF soon perfected and codified.

In anticipation of this special use were being set up the first A.S.C. units (Air Support Control) to be assigned to the G.U.s of the 8th Army, composed of specialists aerial observation, radio communications, transmissions, code and tactical doctrines. With the assignment of ASC was possible to make precision air operations on specific targets reported by the command of the G.U.s to which they belong, indicated on the ground with special reference and to do so the fighter sections, fighter/bombers and light bombers as a long-range precision artillery barrage function, interdiction, antitank, demolition. The objectives designated by the ASC called FASL (Forward Air Support Link) and specified with numbers and names on the conventional battlefield, were identified and coded at brigade level command (infantry or armored) to which organic entity was expected to be awarded ASC.

Between June and October the Wellingtons of the 205th Group and those based in Malta attacked at night the port of Tripoli in 72 raids employing a total of 357 aircraft (on average 5 per mission) while during the day the attacks occurred on the port of Benghazi by Blenheim and Maryland. Raids were made on other points of the Mediterranean: the Aegean, Crete and Sicily for a total of 170 bombing aircraft employed.

The most important objectives of Cyrenaica including Benghazi, Derna and Bardia were assigned to the Wellingtons of Sqdns. 37th, 38th, 70th and 148th (102 raids on the port of Benghazi) with use of a 578 twin-engine (average 5.5 per mission) that operated for about 15 consecutive weeks, achieving the purpose of obstructing the unloading operations in dramatically, and seriously delay the start of the necessary supplies to the front.

The survey was carried out by the Marylands of squadrons 12th and 24th SAAF and the Blenheim of 39th Sqdn. who carried out even offensive missions on airfields in the area (Gambut, Ain el Gazala, El Fteiab, etc.).

Fighters were involved in the protection of advanced fields equipped in the area Fuka, Sidi Barrani, Maaten Baqqush, Marsa Matruk, the direct escort of naval convoys to Tobruk, night interception.[123]

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The lack of a previous radio and technical-operational organization for night interceptions (the first radars were assigned to the RAF/ME in the summer of 1941) had not allowed effective interventions since the EWS (Early Warning System) posts - radar sighting points - were in the process of being set up and it was only possible in October to shoot down the first Ju.88 with a Beaufighter equipped with AI guided by a G.C.I. stationed in the Alessandria area.

The enemy air raids were heavier and more numerous than those the RAF was able to carry out and saw the presence on average of 12/14 Ju.88/He.111 and 6/8 twin-engine/tri-engine aircraft of the R.A. between BR.20 and SM.79.

According to the reports H.Q. RAF/ME, in the four months between July and October, although the Luftwaffe announced the loss of only 81 planes and R.A. were destroyed 395 Axis planes (142 Germans and 253 Italians) of just 89 destroyed by various causes. The losses reported by the RAF were 198 aircraft lost in combat and 48 destroyed on the ground for a total of 246 aircraft, thus exceeding the losses provided by Axis commands.

The Military Intelligence Service (MIS -Military Intelligence Service) had confirmed the presence in the Aegean (Crete, Greece) of 75% of German bombers of the X CAT, 40% of the tactical force (Ju.87/Bf. 109/110) at the Flieger Fuhrer Afrika and II CAT with 60% between bombers and fighters in Sicily with He.111, Ju.88, Bf.109, Ju.87. There were also a hundred aircraft Ju.52 transportation and fifty aircraft for coastal surveillance and rescue at sea. A special squadron of FW.200 four-engine couriers, place particular tasks: strategic distant reconnaissance, transport and urgent mining on the Suez Canal operating from Heraklion airport.

The strength of the X Flieger Korps varied according to the M.I.S. From 400-500 aircraft, of which 250 of 1st line divided between a hundred of fighters, fighter/heavy (Bf.109/110) and 150 dive bombers (Ju.87). (Inaccurate information because the X CAT had Stukas).

The R.A. had in Libya according to British information, seventy bombers and 140 fighter; in the Dodecanese 37 bombers and 46 fighters. (Inaccurate information the first, very close the second).

The service relationships between the X Flieger Korps and RA were coordinated by a special office of the Luftwaffe called Italuft entrusted to General Ritter von Pohl. (Inaccurate information). The war activities between Fl.Fu. Afrika and 5th Air Fleet was completely independent even if the Italian side there was a large participation of fighters, used for directly escorting German bombers; one example, according to English information, of aerial cooperation between the Axis.

THE RECOVERY OFFENSIVE

Between days 15/16 November the Italian air reconnaissance signaled between Fort Magdalene and Marsa Matruk an unusual forward deployment of enemy motorized divisions with an increase of 50% compared to those established in the days 12/13 (from 2,000 to 3,150 vehicles); also it recorded a significant increase in antiaircraft reaction a sign indicative of the strengthening of the English defensive fire device. On the 17th other motorized columns were spotted approaching the west and on the same day the P.G. Afrika was put on alert.

The Axis deployment included the following positions:

C.A.M.	Arm. Div., "Ariete" (Gen. Balotta) at Bir el Gobi Mot. Div., "Trieste" (Gen. Piazzoni) at Hachcim Bir / Bir el Harmat Re. Co. CAM (Col. De Meo) in an intermediate position between the "Ariete" and "Trento"
XXI CORP. (P.G.A.)	Inf. Div. “Pavia "(Gen. Franceschini) south of EI Adem Inf. Div. "Bologna" (Gen., Gloria) north Via Balbi (Tobruk area) Inf. Div. “Brescia "(Gen. Zambon) east front of Tobruk Inf. Div. “Savona "(Gen. De Giorgis) Bardia-Sidi Omar..Capuzzo Mot. Div. “Trento "(Gen. De Stefanis) south front of Tobruk Elements of “Sabratha" Inf. Div. south of the Via Balbi (Tobruk area)
D.A.K. (P.G.A.)	Div. Afrika ZbV (Gen. Summermann) between Sidi and Sidi Rezegh Resciasc 15th Pz. Div. (Gen. Neurnann-Silkow) at Abiar Zaid 21st Pz. Div. (Gen. von Ravenstein) Trig / Capuzzo / Sidi Mgianer 3rd and 33rd Recon units at Sidi Omar and N.E. Bir el Gobi[124]

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For the second time in a year the British 8th Army launched its winter offensive to win over Libya. British soldiers on a "Valentine" tank during operation "Crusader"

The consistency in armored vehicles starring of 69 Pz.II, 136 Pz.III, 46 Pz.IV to 251 tanks in DAK and 137 M.13/41 and 52 L.35 in the CAM. Another 75 Med and 138. Lt. tanks were assigned to other units and principals of Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and the depots.

The Re.Co. (Reparto Esplorante Corazzato) received the first AB.41 armored cars supplied to the P.A.I. Mobile Battalion, armored cars equipped with excellent features and speed. It was an ancillary of the CAM. The DAK disposal of the new 50/43 A/T cannon mod. 41. PAK present in 96 specimens and fielded on the Sollum-Halfaya line 23 of the dreaded multipurpose 88/56 mod. 41 guns.

The total number of armored vehicles prepared by the British 8th Army (Gen. Cunningham) amounted to 724 specimens type "Valentine" and "Matilda" for the support to the infantry, "Cruiser" and "Stuart" for armored units. 69 other tanks were in the fortress of Tobruk.

The plan "Crusader" prepared by Gen. Cunningham and approved by Gen. Auchinleck, was set to the following movements: crossing the Egyptian border opposite Fort Maddalena (50 km south of Sidi Omar) by the 7th Arm. Div. and the South African 1st Inf. Div. (XXX Corps) (Gen. C.W.M. Norrie).

Isolation of the garrison of Sollum by the XIII Corps (2nd New Zealander Inf. Div., 4th Inf. Div. Anglo-Indian, the 1st Arm. Bde).

In the interval between the 13th Corps in the north and 30th in the south (average width 100/110 km) would operate the fast 4th Armored Brigade. In conjunction with the offensive from the west, the Tobruk garrison would have launched an attack to the East-S.E pushing towards Gabr Saleh where would come the XXX Corps diversionary attacks were provoked from Giarabub towards Gialo and beyond.

The locations of the various Axis commands were as follows: Pz. Gr. "Afrika" - - Gambut / Bardia; XXI Corps (Gen. E. Navarrini) -El Adem; C.A.M. (Gen. Gambara) -Bir el Gobi; X Corp -Benghazi; XX Corp. -Tripoli.

The transformations that had been received in the Middle East with the establishment of the 9th Army (General Maitland Wilson) and 8th (Gen. Alan Cunningham) had been intended to harmonize the distribution of British forces and strengthen the most dangerous areas first among all the Egyptian Western. For this purpose, the 8th Army had added the XIII Army Corps (Gen. Godwin-Austen) and XXX (Gen. V.V. Pope) even the X (Gen. W.G. Holmes) while Gen. W.W. Norrie had replaced the deceased Gen. Pope killed in a plane crash.

The planning for operation "Crusader" absorbed all the attention of the commander in chief Gen. Auchinleck, determined to prove to the Imperial War Cabinet that the 8th Army would not disappoint the expectations of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who had devoted to preparation of the new offensive all his will and hopes and all that material as we had intended abundantly, since the challenging offensive had the greatest success.

At the end of October they had arrived in Egypt the following materials: 300 tanks mod. A.15 baptized "Crusader", 170 infantry tanks “Matilda” Mark II and 111 “Valentine”, 300 USA production tanks mod. M.3 A1 "Stuart" baptized "Honey" and very fast, because with radial aviation engines (64 km/h), 600 field gun from 88/27, 240 heavy and light anti-aircraft guns, 200 antitank cannons 40/50, 900 infantry mortars, 34,000 vehicles of which 7,000 US production.[125]

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They were placed at the Marsa Matruk area 32,000 tons of materials.

They were completed at 100% all the armored units and formed new ones. The tank power between 8th Army and the Axis was brought as 3 to 2 equal ratio was obtained between WDAF and the Italian-German air force.

For operations deep into the southernmost desert (32° Lat.) was formed a special unit called "Oasis Force" destined to operate on the main route Giarabub-Gialo-Marada and with time to provide the necessary protection to a secret air base called LG 125 (Landing Ground n. 125) constituted by the LRDG staff in a desert town 160 km NW of Giarabub (Bab el Serir), located in the crow flies 350/360 km from Benghazi between 23° 50' Long. and 31° 06' Lat. and then be able to hit all the targets to the east of the city and with great tactical surprise on the origin.

Important tasks were also entrusted to the LRDG of (Col. Bagnold) which constituted two squadrons with six patrols to special missions and Lt. Col. Prendergast maintained radio contact with the two prepared secret bases in Cyrenaica (Gebel Achdar and Es Sahabi West) from which came the reports and information to the Headquarters of the 8th Army on Axis movements.

The first job forces made available by WDAF for "Crusader" included 8 squadrons: 1st SAAF, 2nd SAAF, 94th, 238th, 274th ,112th, 229th and 250th with RAF Hurricane and Kittyhawk; 5 sqdns. light bombers: 14th and 24th SAAF, 39th, 45th, 55th with Maryland and RAF Blenheim; 4 fighter/bombers: 3rd SAAF, 4th SAAF, 80th and 260th RAF Hurricane and Tomahawk; a squadron 35th for tactical reconnaissance with Hurricane and reserves the 253rd Wing with squadrons 208th, 237th and 451st of tactical support Hurricanes.

The budget of each squadron consisted 16/18 aircraft first line to which were to add another 7 reserve at the A.R.P. (Aircraft Replacement Pool) an advanced deposit lodged at Wadi Natrun in anticipation of “Crusader”, to which they could tap into the operational squadrons to cover losses in combat or in accidents. Altogether were available 450 aircraft of the 1st line and 120 of the reserve.

The units of WDAF were to also add squads of groups 201st and 250th with about 160/170 other aircraft of bombers, fighters, torpedo bombers, reconnaissance aircraft with a total of at least 16/18 per squadron.

The A.R.P. formed with the absorption of Maintenance Unit gave excellent results as in November alone topped the organic needs of the units providing 232 planes they replaced from time to time with depots and withdrawals at aircraft repair shops where flocked respectively, aircraft from Takoradi, Gura, Port Sudan and the Mediterranean via Malta and those posted to the rear by line units for inspections and repairs.

For the implementation of A.S.C. Service, which commenced at the "Crusader" had been prepared by the command WDAF accommodation in three L.G., RDF type of sighting 10 AWS devices installed in trucks, operating in cooperation with a Mobile G.C.I. in a limited area and called "Fighter Airfield Area" (30°/31º Lat.24 °/25º Long.). On advanced materials fields had been herded, supplies, technical personnel, radio communications equipment, personnel of the RAF Regiment for the protection of the airfields and mobile anti-aircraft defense with Bofors 40/56. The G.C.I. would coordinate the intervention of fighters to facilitate interceptions and through the ASC provided its Flights in tactical mission safety in the operating area signaling the presence of Axis fighters revealed with mod. 10 AWS radar distance between 80-90 miles (130-140 km). With these revolutionary innovations the air war in North Africa was a big leap in quality and entered a phase of extraordinary technological developments that radically transformed concepts and doctrines of the fight in the skies. In October the whole of WDAF staff underwent in Canal and Palestine airports a final shift to round of tactical co-operation under the training supervision of Captain B.E. Embry, manager of new attack techniques, which had prepared a new tactical study after the failure of "Battle Axe".

On October 20, the latest information gleaned from M.I.S. They gave the Axis 385 planes in service in Cyrenaica against 528 of WDAF.

Another 72 German bombers were between Crete and Greece, 79 other aircraft in Tripoli.[126]

Was reported the presence among the fighters of Fl. Fu. Afrika the new Messerschmitt model. "F" with greater speed than the "E" version. The “Valentine” tank should hinder hopes of the British, the appearance of the panzer model Mk.IV F.2 equipped with cannon of 75/43 countered by quick firing gun of 40/60 that arming the English tanks. For the Italian M.13/41 medium tank instead did not fed of particular concern because of its technical mediocrity unchanged compared to mod. M.13/40. Were available in the 8th Army 738 tanks of the 1st line as follows: 62 A.9/10, 210 A.15, 173 M.3A1, 201 Mk.II/III, 92 tanks of various model. 259 others were under repair or subject to change in Egypt and 232 of the US model were traveling through Cape of Good Hope.

The RAF/Malta was asked to co-operate indirectly to "Crusader" with the task to attack with bombers / torpedo planes Axis convoys, embarkation / disembarkation ports of Naples, Palermo, Tripoli and Benghazi. Other tasks were assigned to the Royal Navy in Malta with its DDs and submarines.

The preparations were started by the Wellingtons of 205th Group who attacked on several occasions assisted at night Benghazi, by day from Maryland in charge of the SAAF to hit the smaller port of Derna, Bardia and Bomba. From November 4 to 13 were targeted for 10 consecutive nights of Derna depots with Wellington, Blenheim Maryland and supported by the Albacore of FAA in flare function: a practical way to profitably use the outdated biplanes otherwise unemployable. The Blenheim of the 55th Sqdn. They had in the meantime found accommodation on the desert LG.125, occasionally used to avoid arousing suspicion in reconnaissance Axis. But also in the Italian-German camp there had been some changes with the arrival in the Mediterranean of the U.Boote "Arnauld Group" and one of these – the U.81 - just came from Gibraltar, attacked and sank the CV. "Ark Royal" just back from a Hurricane resupply mission to Malta on the day of November 13, followed the 25th by the U.331 that equally bold and lucky, sank, within minutes the BB. “Barham” north of Bardia reducing the strength of M.F. to 3 BB. only two of which are efficient as the "Warspite" being under repair from battle of Crete. The Wellingtons attacked Naples, Palermo and the airports of Sicily and Tripoli destroying 16 Axis aircraft while in Libya suffered other attacks the airfields of Benina, Derna, Barce, Berka, Tmimi, Martuba, Ain el Gazala, Gambut and Baheira by the WDAF.

Axis night attacks occurred on the Egyptian airports Fuka, Maaten Baqqush, Suez with destruction of plants and materials. Bf.110 destroyers attacked Giarabub destroying a Blenheim and damaging another 7 twin-engine with fuel fires and damage to plants.

With the arrival in Egypt of the first units of the SAS Regiment. (Special Air Service RAF) with highly trained paratroopers in coups, sabotage and destruction, even the H.Q. RAF/ME was available prepared men for special missions to oppose the LRDG normally used by the Army for identical purposes and that he had been raised, strengthened and expanded its organization by transferring most of its squadrons from Siwa to Cufra with detachment to Hasciscia in the south-eastern Libyan desert and mobile principals to Tazerbo and Zighan. Between the months of June and the middle of November the LRDG had done a great exploration to recognize the desert terrain that led to Sirtica and Tripolitania, evaluate the possibility of following it with columns of vehicles, establish caches at predetermined distances (gasoline, food, water, ammunition) and many reports were forwarded to HQ Cairo reporting possibilities, routes, difficulties, orographic characteristics for a possible penetration from the south arch of Sidra that the British command had in mind to implement alternative and complementary action in the "Crusader". But the LRDG did other things too. In agreement with the Arabs organized observation posts placed in Gebel Achdar and upper eyelid along the current Cyrenaica "Balbia" from Barce Berta and in the es Sirual area (80 km west of Mechili) where signaled in Cairo situation of the Axis G.U. in transit on the coastal area, their composition, the type of armament and equipment supplied, the organic, the intensity of automobile traffic, places of control and surveillance, fuel depots, command, and the main forums and many other useful implemented with the help of the Arabs where informers and saboteurs were recruited who had carried out acts of sabotage in Bir Dufan (telephone lines interrupted) in Benghazi / K2 (3 aircraft destroyed and three others damaged in March).[127]

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On the eve of the "Crusader" the LRDG received strict orders to carry out a series of sabotage in the rear of the Axis, particularly on columns of vehicles, fueling areas, road works and installations, depots of materials and ammunition in the stretch from Sirte to Benghazi and Barce to Alcroma.

The SAS Regt. had from the H.Q./RAF M.E. precise action directives assigned to Maj. David Sterling commander of the detachment, which was sent at first to Giarabub, then, after the occupation of Gialo the new secret base Maragh where he received the new provisions under the “Crusader”, consistent in attacks on airfields of Ain el Gazala and Tmimi after a mission that began with paratroopers had failed to navigation difficulties and weather the night on November 15, with the killing and capture of almost all participants. A "Bombay", carrying 12 of the SAS men was even forced to land by a German fighter and captured intact. On the eve of the English offensive there had been another failed mission to the work of the 11th Commandos who were to attack the Rommel’s HQ. near Apollonia and kill all the occupants. But even this step as it will be more fully described, did not obtain positive results.

Even the Germans made attempt in imitation of the English coups using the special units of the "Brandenburg" Regiment (a special corps trained for sabotage and destruction in the rear) but also they failed in the enterprise, where the detachment "Afrika" was landed, from the U.331 near El Daba in the night on November 15 with the task of destroying the Alexandria-Marsa Matruk railroad on which flowed supplies for the enemy: spotted by security units of the English, the men of “Brandenburg" were killed or captured after a firefight.

In the preparatory period from October 14 to 17 November, the WDAF employed most of its units for missions in Cyrenaica losing 80 aircraft including fighters and bombers against 22 German and 35 Italian destroyed during the raids. November 18 had been prepared 31 squadrons deployed on three operating segments: advanced, middle, rear and comprising 14 Sqd's. 128 fighter and fighter/bombers, two heavy/combat, 8 of light bombers, 4 of medium bombers, 3 tactical reconnaissance, 2 surveillance Flights/strategic observations. The units belonging to the following air forces: 6 to SAAF, 2 to RAAF, 1 to Rhodesia, 1 to France, 21 to England.

THE ENGLISH BEGINNINGS OF "CRUSADE"

The new British offensive in North Africa, designed in the intentions and hopes of the English to beat once more Italians and their allies Germanic tracing the events of "Compass", it had such contrasting aspects, confused and contradictory as to leave friends and perplexed enemies on the tangled battlefield of Marmarica had lost control of the actions, the general situation, the location of his units and even more the outcome, the results of individual battles that fragmentary and disorderly had occurred or were in progress unwinding the confusing terrain of struggle.

The greatest surprise, however, was by Rommel, which gave unexpectedly, for the first time, a discontinuous yield, an opacity of behavior, a lack of operational lucidity and maneuver that surprised a somewhat everyone: Italian, English and also some of the most quoted German commanders. An early symptom since later, between the retreat of December, the events of summer 1942, the battle of El Alamein, Tunisia and Normandy was to provide other; convincing confirmations on and discussed contrasting personalities of the German general.

The British attack was manifested in its breadth and gravity suddenly and contrary to the forecasts of Rommel and "strategic magicians” the DAK, who thought highly unlikely an offensive on a large scale of the British, as rightly noted and reported by Italian commands once again snubbed and overlooked by the Germans. "Situation unchanged" recorded the war diary of the Operations Office of the P.G. Afrika as of November 18, 1941 in the same time that the British were launching "Crusader".[128]

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The same day to the instructions given by P.G.A. to the D.A.K. was set in motion from east to west to reach the planned positions the attack on Tobruk was to leave undefended the Egyptian front was entrusted - 80 km west - to only the "*Ariete*" which fortunately will block part of the impetuousness of the enemy armored units, swept almost undisturbed by an efficient contrast into the interior of Marmarica. On the morning of the 19th resulted surrounded the right area of the Italian-German static deployment between Sollum and Halfaya, the 22nd Arm. Brigade aimed at full speed towards the junction of Bir el Gobi where they clashed with the "*Ariete*" losing 40 tanks and a number of prisoners and retreating to the east after this unexpected resistance from the brave Italian soldiers, who had had more than 200 dead, wounded and missing, 34 M.13 tanks destroyed along with eight guns.

The situation was so uncertain as to surprise a whole fighter group of R.A. intention to refuel in the springboard field of Sidi Rezegh, well versed in the Axis area and then felt more than safe to dangers.

At 16:00 the same day, a Armoured detachment of the 6th Royal Tanks Regt. of the 7th Arm. Brigade. (Gen. G.M.O. Davy) under the command of Col. Campbell, who was marching undisturbed by Bir el Gobi towards the Sidi Azeis- Umm el Hatian roadway to stop the Axis traffic, surprised the airfield of Sidi Rezegh (20 km to the east of El Adem) many Italian aircraft in technical stop and quickly attacked them with "Stuart" tanks by hitting them with the 37 mm guns at a distance and up close with machine guns to prevent them from taking off. 19 planes were destroyed and only two were able to take off. They were captured vehicles and 80 between pilots, specialists and airmen of the Regina Areonautica.

When Rommel was convinced that it was not a deep raid but a real offensive on broad front, ran for cover by reversing the direction of travel to DAK and implementing a series of countermoves that disorient the British for the temerity they were aiming but eventually confuse even the commander of Panzer Gruppe Afrika.

While British armored units moved to the west and northwest, the German panzer formations were brought to the east, south east and west at the same time. DAK units penetrated Egyptian territory in an attempt to cut supplies to the British XXX Corps and British armored groups were pushing towards Tobruk in Libya, attempting to rejoin the besieged garrison that pressed to move eastward and facilitate the meeting with the 8th Army.

The Italian units for their part repelled their attacks from the west and from the south-east and the great battleground for a length of 150 km and a width of a hundred, occurred a frightening confusion intermingled of units and operating from different directions and locations from those stipulated aggravated lack the communications news link between the CAM and the DAK and isolated current performance remained equally the infantry of the XXI Corps and the same for the Supercomando ASI. General Rommel for 4 days there was no news of him and had to track him down at any cost to call him back to his duties as subordinate Gen. Bastico to put aware of the situation and have him precise information on the outcome of the battle.

The surprise caused by "Crusader" the with Axis Air Force command had also left uncertainty, while WDAF that had no concerns like that, it acted decisively with a number of aircraft ever seen before in a large part of the new model that gave them from the start air superiority on the battlefield.

On the night of the 18th were transferred on LG.122, 123, 124 and 126 (Ex Scegga, Uescek, & el Heira and south of Maddalena) the 33rd and 80th squadrons equipped with Hurricane II/B tactical support, that in the morning of 19th attacked the airfields near the border by destroying Hs.126 reconnaissance at El Adem, a Ca.309 and CR.42 at Gialo knocking down another 2 CR.42 caught in flight. At Martuba were lost 2 SM.79 and at Tmimi surprised 5 Ju.52 taking off by the Beaufighter of the 272nd Sqdn. and other decentralized aviation field including Bf.109 and Ju.87. 4 British aircraft were shot down by the A/A fire.

The same day the 15th Pz. Div. clashed near Bir el Gobi with 4th and 22nd Arm. Bdes. and destroyed their 26 tanks between "Valentine", "Crusader" and "Honey" a clear sign that the new tanks, the British and Americans could not be considered equal to the German.

On the 20th of the Maryland bombers of the 12th Sqdn. attacked the gathered area of the *Ariete* Div. and divisional communications center of El Adem, also launching propaganda leaflets inviting the Italian soldiers to abandon the Germans and to surrender to the 8th Army; the 21st the DAK attacked the South Africa 1st Inf. Div. and the 7th Arm. Div. with the support of Ju.87 escorted by Bf.109 that felled 7 P.40 against the felling of 3 Messerschmitt.[129]

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In aid of the proven British armored units they intervened called by divisional ASC and with the collaboration of the RDF, the 3rd and 112th Sqdns. and that they engage in combat with attacking German planes while the Germanic tanks moving in the desert.

On the 22nd heavy bombing was repeated on the *Ariete* and *Trieste* positions in Bir Hacheim area by Blenheim and Hurricane, P .40 and only a strong fighter Italian-Germans effort striking down 4 enemy planes of the 45th Sqdn., was slacken the pace of the raids that were integrated in the same day by the intervention of Beaufighter who performed 75 mission flights on Axis motorized-armored columns causing heavy losses in men and equipment.

In the reports of the WDAF it was mentioned the contribution and precision demonstrated by the 80th and 272nd squadrons in the attacks on the ground.

On the night of the new offensive missions Wellingtons Albacore supported by the FAA in the Pathfinder function (marking of targets) around Tobruk to ease the pressure on the garrison and facilitate the sortie eastward.

On November 23, the battle lasted still confused and uncertain in its development to the point that the commands did not know the whereabouts of subordinate units. The Stabs Kolumns Rommel (motorized detachmant of the GS/PGA) during a day in the desert raid caught near Gabr Saleh (track and Gobi-Gasr Bir el Abid) 30 km. to the east of the positions of the *Ariete*, Gens. Cunningham, Norris and Gott in relationship and almost caught them full with their respective staffs. The commander of the 8th Army was saved by quickly taking off in his plane chased by machine-gun shots, the other two generals were jumping on their vehicles and spun at high speed to the east protected by bursts of the escort.

An episode of the Tobruk garrison reached a town which lies just 15 kilometers away from the vanguards of the British 7th Armored Brigade, the maximum point of penetration, before it was rejected again in the perimeter of the fortress by the Axis troops.

The day of the 23rd was characterized by the order of the DAK moving in an area between the Trigh Capuzzo and Bir Chleta (S.W. of Gambut) to focus and launch a coordinated attack and rational system than those confused and inconclusive unleashed in the past days. The *Ariete* received the order from the CAM to remain watchful waiting overseeing the junction Bir el Gobi-Gabr Saleh with its Re.Co. stationed in the north near El Adem in Trigh Capuzzo, while the *Trieste* was in the 2nd echelon at Bir Hacheim ready to move or to Tobruk or eastward as needed; The ZbV "Afrika" Div. which had changed its name to the 90th Light Div. motorized, was on the front of Tobruk with a support group of army tanks. In the evening Rommel finally clarified his plan to Gen. Bastico: go to the Egyptian border to truncate English logistic lines, then with reverse move westward in the direction of Sidi Rezegh and close with the help of the CAM the entire sector between Trigh Capuzzo and Trigh el Abd: to trap the enemy armored forces that were in the area, including the eastern sector between units of Tobruk and the Italian-German armored units. A bold and reckless maneuver that only a fervent revolutionary mindset could conceive and carryout. But to get the expected result Rommel, also needed CAM detached and independent from the PGA, and in this situation he had no better solution than to take action to Mussolini's German liaison general, sensitized by an urgent request to the Supreme Command that requested and obtained Mussolini 's coveted authorization issued with the following telegram:

SUPREME COMMAND n. 30959/OP. 23 Nov. 1941/XX -Hours 12:15.

For General BASTICO

"It follows from the situation I draw firm conviction that the battle fought in Marmarica must be unitary. I then decided that all Marmarica troops, including therefore Corps of Gambara, pass immediately to General Rommel orders then assume conduct entire action under your command. Into account more than ever on value and tenacity of commanders and soldiers of Italy."

MUSSOLINI.

And in this way the CAM, on which the Supercomando ASI was great expectations as a unique and effective movable tool and of the Italian commands available to maneuver, were transferred to the P.G. Afrika.[130]

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From certain operational points of view, it was more than natural that on the battlefield, faced with the dangers inherent in the enemy offensive, there should be a unified command that could completely dispose of all the means and men available to thwart any threat, neutralize and blunt enemy initiatives, but the German general, who lacked tact and sensitivity, had to take due account of the prerogatives, jealousies and reservations of the Italian commands not accustomed to such methods of behavior and when he did not obtain what he wanted by good means, he asked and obtained from the Supreme Command which sensitized Mussolini appropriately.

Of course the collaboration to be effective was to prove unconditional and free of special mental reservations in common interest of the Axis.

The 24th the DAK began to move eastward, Rommel disappeared after him leaving irritated and free of news the Italian commands, while in time continued with English movements with the support of WDAF who had moved forward on the Sidi Barrani trampoline field where the 272nd Sqdn. again attacked the airfields of Derna, Gazala, Martuba Tmimi and causing destruction and between aircraft and material fires. A first clash between Panzers of the 21st and the Stuart tanks of the 4th Brigade, occurred near Gambut and despite the support provided to armor units armored units by the ASC in connection with the 451st Sqdn. RAAF, the British lost 23 tanks against 2 Mk. III destroyed and another 6 damaged.

Equally important mobile GCI who had moved on the airfields of Marmarica coordinating the activity of the Wings 262nd and 258th present with 8 squadrons of Hurricanes and Tomahawk.

Between 25/26 November in conjunction with Rommel’s counter-maneuver, the WDAF exercised maximum pressure on the Axis employing 6 bomber squadrons, including the French 84th "Lorraine Sqdn." Blenheim and Maryland, two tactical squadrons of P.40 and Beaufighter.

The offensive of DAK did not cause particular results and Rommel decided to return to Marmarica where the chaotic situation persisted even, motioned during the retreat to repeated attacks by fighter/bombers WDAF against panzer and motorized vehicles, especially in the area of El Duda focus of resistance, attacked by 23 P.40 with bombs and machine guns and defended by aircraft of the Fl.Fu. Afrika who suffered eight knockdowns against two by the English.

Also underwent airstrikes the Axis logistic centers in Benghazi, Derna, Benina, Berka while Wellingtons with 38th Sqdn. bombed Naples in order to slow down the current inflow of supplies to Libya.

Also in the English side there were uncertainties, disappointments and doubts to the point that on the 26th Cunningham was replaced by Gen. Ritchie in command of the 8th Army, for having also lost operational control of the employee units during the 5-day offensive in Marmarica. On the 28th Rommel returned his HQ to El Adem discouraged by the failure against the British supply lines, and the next day is made available to provide explanations to the rightful Gen. Bastico although in the meantime units of the New Zealand 2nd Div. had made reunification with Tobruk troops in the village of El Duda, increasing even more the confusion and fragmentation of what was still called improperly battle front, since even British armored units concerned about the return of DAK to Marmarica and sensing the danger of circumvention as proposed by Rommel, were returning quickly to the Egyptian border made target to air strikes of the Axis.

On the day of the 29th, an Italian-German counter-attack in the eastern sector of Tobruk reestablished the situation by restoring the encirclement of the fortress and pushing eastward part of the New Zealand infantry, who became trapped in the defensive perimeter of Tobruk. All, friends and enemies were now exhausted, disheartened, confused by the outcome of the battle that had not generated until then no winners or losers.

Between November 28 and December it had registered more attacks of Wellington on the port of Benghazi and the airfields of El Adem, Acroma, Gazala followed, day by incursions of Maryland, Baltimore, and Boston Blenheim supported by Hurricane and Tomahawk. The release of the first Boston and Baltimore had resulted in the gradual withdrawal of Blenheim mostly with engines out of use for prolonged use of the desert L.G.. A very heavy night attack was also brought to the junction of Lamluda that controlled the pre-gebeliche origins of the slopes el Mechili -Bir Tengeder.[131]

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The heavy wear and tear of the squadrons of the 1st line meant the arrival of two new reserve units: the 208th and 237th Rhodesian aviation of tactical reconnaissance attacking at their onset the Tmimi airport.

On December 3, the 22nd Guards Armored Brigade attacked the junction of Bir el Gobi units of RECAM (Scout unit of the CAM) but was rejected with heavy losses by a Battalion of the Young Volunteers GIL battles firmly and with the valor of veterans. As of December 4 the just the DAK had suffered the following losses: 4,000 killed, 142 tanks (Pz. Mk. II-III-IV), 41 guns, 34 A/T. 50 and 8 88/56,60 mortars, 15 FLAK 20mm machine guns, 10 half-tracks tractors, 724 trucks. The losses of armored vehicles accounted 2/3 of the initial force of the DAK, but the situation could be considered even more worrying for the loss at sea of an entire convoy with armored vehicles and direct supplies to Libya, this event that convinced Mussolini to write the Fuhrer a letter which highlighted the serious transport problem for Libya, the need to use the safer routes to Tunisia and stating that when faced with a monthly requirement of 120,000 tons of supplies after the destruction of a convoy of 7 ships, it had been possible to reach only 40,000 tons to Libya of materials using 100,000 tons of military escorts.

But something was moving positively since the Luftwaffe sent the II Flieger Korps to Italy with Field Marshal Kesselring and General Cavallero gave the news to Supercomando ASI novelty sending Gen. Bastico the dispatch n. 31042/O.P. as follows:

"Commander Marshal Kesselring 2nd Luftflotte has taken on 1 December command of the X CAT pending II CAT arrivals to complete in Sicily. Marshal has given the X CAT following order: begins stop.

1) The X Corps will prevent, with concentration & own shares through constant attacks ordered a retreat of enemy forces. It must reach the goal in a direct agreement with the Italian forces areas that will receive its directives.

2) Equally important task is to isolate Tobruk. Here too cooperation with the Italian forces. For the settlement of this collaboration it will be established in framework & Superaereo agreement, after hearing commander X Air Corps & will then be announced.

3) It once again underlines the decisive action that the air weapon place in this period of struggle. order end. Signed Marshal Albert Kesselring. stop.

In relation to that & the sense of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force please have this command since our Air Force will fully adapt to the above directives that have been agreed between the Marshal Kesselring & Supreme Command. In particular, it emphasizes the need to prevent influx supplies into Tobruk fort. This condition is essential to achieve at any cost. stop. Cavallero."

Meanwhile Rommel's maneuver to try to surround the British armored forces in Marmarica relying on the help of the CAM, was coming to the conclusion with pliers that was closing in Bir el Gobi area where the *Ariete* had to be the right wing of the winding.

Unfortunately things did not go in the direction predicted by Rommel for a number of setbacks: the death of Gen. Neumann-Sylkow commanding the 15th Panzer Div., the capture of Gen. von Ravenstein commander of the 21st Panzer, the serious delay in the CAM moving to block the retreat of the British did fail in this opportunity and the British bolted eastward filtering through a gap left vacant by the pincer just a few kilometers with severe disappointment to Rommel who took him with the CAM commander, responsible in his opinion of failure of the maneuver of encirclement, of insubordination, of preconceived reservations about the PGA, who fails to cooperate.

There was nothing left to do now that the situation had somewhat clarified well ahead of the two sides, which collect the immense desert the remains of Panzer Gruppe Afrika and retire west on a new defensive line.

This sudden decision to Rommel was not shared by the Italian command and there was bitter dissension and violent arguments between Gen. Rommel and Bastico on whether or not to abandon the siege of Tobruk and retire on the expected line of Ain el Gazala. Insubordination Rommel was none other than the German answer to the General Bastico, as opposed to the same attitude from Gambara.

Rommel, however, stubbornly wanted to maintain his point of view on the matter by withdrawing, on his own initiative and thanks to his prerogatives as operational commander of the eastern sector, the troops deployed on the eastern perimeter of Tobruk and in this way from 5 December the fortress was automatically unlocked at the eastern gate and the long siege ended to the surprise of the English.[132]

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Not satisfied with even this measure, in a service meeting that took place on the evening of the 5th, Rommel also mentioned the possibility of a general retreat to Tripolitania for fear of exposing themselves to a danger of circumvention from the south by the gebelico towards Ajdabiya and become the scapegoat of a Bede Fomm number two, with all the psychological, propaganda and prestige that this hypothesis meant for his position of commander of the Axis and the Reich.

The found and favorable opportunities to abandon Cyrenaica was quickly exploited by Gen. Ritchie, already perplexed by the sudden abandonment of the eastern Tobruk positions, which rearranged his proven units, reinforced with fresh units from Egypt arrived, completed expeditiously organic two units of the ranks and overturning a situation that seems uncertain and nebulous, compromised and confused, re-launched the offensive westward the 8th Army cleverly taking advantage of the Axis difficulties.

Between November 18 and early December the Fl.Fu. Afrika had been reinforced by the III/St. G.3 and a Staffel of the II/JG.53 needed to revitalize the tried units, who had continuously attacked in the course of two weeks concentrations enemies and in the first days of December front- between Ras el Arid, Taibel Salem, Taieb el Asem.

In the southern desert Oasis Force had progressed in his tormented march on the route traced by LRDG, subjected to repeated attacks by bombers and fighter Axis and particularly Italian, losing dozens of vehicles on the slopes before reaching Augila evacuated by the local garrison and directing to Gialo that pitted greater resistance nipped after providing two new airstrips between parallel 22º/23º, used profitably by WDAF with the 270th Wing units.

On December 5, occurred a violent aerial combat in the sky of El Adem between Ju.87 escorted by Bf.109 and G.50 against Curtiss P.40. According to British news source were shot down at least 15 Junkers, 1 Messerschmitt, 2 Fiat and 1 Macchi but in reality the Italian-German losses were much lower and merely 6 Ju.87 (two of which were Italian) killed by A/A shooting against the felling also validated by the English, the 5 P .40 of squadrons 112th and 250th as well as a Blenheilm of the "Lorraine" shot down by a Bf.109 of JG.53.

The next day another Messerschmitt repeated the success torching a Beaufighter on Tmimi sky but WDAF than compensated the loss by destroying flying a Bf.110 of ZG.26 carrying the commander of the III Group Major Kaschka.

Had begun in the meantime the retreat of the P.G. Afrika from Marmarica and the hasty decision to Rommel meant the loss of much of the technical equipment of the Luftwaffe on Ain el Gazala and Derna airfields, belonging to JG.27 and ZG.26, were among other fuel-free ignited prematurely before recovery with convoys. It was necessary to hastily organize an airlift between Cyrenaica and Crete with Ju.52 to provide Fl.Fu. Afrika gasoline required to operate and move.

The WDAF attacked several times the fields around Derna and the RAF was bombing the Maleme and Iraklion airport which took off from the three-engined transport direct to El Fteiah intercepted during the flight by the Beaufighter of 272nd Sqdn. and Maryland thwarted by Bf.110, while it was being implemented the expedient of flying above the water the Ju.52 suitably camouflaged with green/black/blue to confuse them with the sea surface. At the same time the strategic air force intensified raids on Libya's airports suffered the following damage: Castelbenito - 5 Italian aircraft destroyed and seven others damaged; Derna - 1 Italian aircraft and five Germans destroyed (11 others damaged); Tmimi -2 German planes destroyed and 10 damaged (incursion of 10 December 1941).

December 10 began with the Boston bombers of 24th Sqdn. who attacked an airport near Gazala losing 5 twin-engine culled by the Bf.109s protecting the airfield. On the 12th new combat between Messerschmitt "Fritz" of JG. 53 and Hurricane of 94th with the loss of four English fighters while another 4 Hurricane/Tomahawk were destroyed by anti-aircraft fire near Martuba and another 3 above Mechili intercepted by Bf.l09/F.[133]

To intensify the clearing operations of Cyrenaica the X CAT was offering to Gen. Frohlich 15 Ju.52 that were assigned to El Fteiah.

In the night on December 15 came into action LRDG attacking the Tamet airfield to over 800 km from the Axis lines destroying 1 Cant.1007, 1 SM.79, 2 Ca.309, 1 CR.42 mining in addition to the Balbia West of Sirte.

The LRDG units came from Giofra where it worked with about twenty other motorized detachments in the Italian rear. The 20th was the turn of Barce where they went lost four aircraft while the security departments of the field repelled an attack by English friendly Arab elements. The 22nd Wadi Tamet was again to be visited by LRDG with even more serious damage: 3 Ju.87, 3 CR.42, 1 MC.200 of R.A. and 4 German Stukas were the budget of the heavy night-destruction which was still to be added the attack resulted in Ajdabiya, where 24 planes were destroyed: 8 CR.42, 6 MC.200, 5 G.50, 2 Ca.311, 2 Ca.164. In one night 35 Axis planes had been lost at the hands of a handful of daring commandos!

Continued the retreat of the Axis on the roads of Cyrenaica subjected to heavy air raids by the WDAF. The tragic balance sheet of the 16th when a column of Bersaglieri of the Ariete in transit in the area Mechili was mistakenly attacked by Stukas that killed or wounded hundreds of Italian soldiers, including the division commander Gen. Piazzoni, deceived probably by the captured trucks used by Bersaglieri and artillerymen but had exhibited recognition towels, nationality insignia and fired rockets and smoke optical signaling. The CAM command made Rommel a strong protest over the incident entirely unjustified.

A few days later the British reconnaissance reported the presence in the field of El Magrum of a strong concentration of Axis fighter planes and Gen. Ritchie agree with Gen. Cunningham decided to foil the potential threat pushing back the Italian- German deployment as westernmost possible sending an armored column through the Jebel Achadar in an attempt to repeat another Beda Fomm; simultaneously a large formation of P.40 from three squadrons attacked El Magrum on the 22nd destroying 5 Ju.87, 4 Ju.52, 1 Bf.109, 1 Mc.202, 1 Ju.88, 1 Do.17: 13 aircraft lost in a few minutes of hellish bombardment/strafing. In the night a subsequent bombing caused further destruction, followed the next morning with a series of raids on the airfields of Benina, Berka, Barce, Ain el Gazala, Derna. Were lost 13 Italian fighter planes between G.50, CR.42, MC.200.

The 19th was vacated the largest airport of El Fteiah of Derna remained to the last in activities to allow the airlift with Crete, with the result that came to miss the early warning of the airfield evacuation to a group of Ju.52 in flight from Crete who were greeted upon landing by a thick roll of automatic weapons of the Indian infantry had occupied the land for aviation and set fire to some three-engined while others, albeit affected, could take off again and back to Maleme.

In the stages of retreat Rommel asked the Fl.Fu. Afrika maximum cooperation to protect the P.G.A. and Gen. Frohlich intensified attacks on Sidi Barrani/Marsa Matruk, missions on L.G. desert hoping to find flight activities, in many cases found, dive bombing on mechanized columns and supplies between Bu Hamar/Sidi Omar, strafing the roads and tracks of Marmarica between Sidi Rezegh, Capuzzo, Gambut, Gabr Saleh, Bir el Hamarin, Trigh el Abd and Oasis Force attacked heavily in the village of Wadi el Hamin (100 km west of Ajdabiya) limit this very disturbing to a potential threat from the south in the Gulf Sirtica and also strafing of motorized columns Hacheim Bir/Bir el Gobi flowing back westbound.

On December 25 was evacuated Benghazi airport on which the British accessed the presence of 64 Axis planes destroyed or sabotaged in only one field of Benina, many of which, however, useless for previous damage or otherwise of no practical use.

Among those discouraging news came unexpected but position like, the confirmation of the sinking of battleships "Queen Elisabeth" and "Valiant" in the port of Alexandria the Mediterranean Fleet, attacked in the night on December 19 by a handful of brave and bold Italian sailors with explosive charges had been able to do alone, that on several occasions it was not possible to armored ships, cruisers, bombers and torpedo planes: to inflict hard and decisive blow to the British Navy in the Mediterranean![134]

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The event opened new large Axis strategic possibilities as to start from 1942 Royal Navy no longer had in the Mediterranean, battleships or aircraft carriers swept away relentlessly from the Navy and Axis aviation.

Malta did not seem to resent the effect of the new situation after the semi-destruction of Force K stumbled into a minefield Italian, for it continued with stubborn obstinacy to hunt convoys with submarines and aircraft causing new sinking and painful losses.

On December 29, in a new letter from Mussolini to Hitler, Mussolini described the end through exhaustion of the "Crusader" ended without defeat or winners, stating among other things that the loss of a convoy of four ships carrying hundreds of Panzer and M.13 tanks had jeopardized the outcome of the struggle in Cyrenaica and only with massive use of the Battle Fleet had it been possible to arrive in Libya essential supplies.

THE 5th AIR FLEET DURING "CRUSADER"

On the eve of the English offensive the 5th Air Fleet of Libya had exceeded by a few days the command crisis with the advent in command of G.U.A. Gen. S.A. Vittorio Marchesi which had replaced Gen. Ajmone Cat as of 6 November.

The structure of the fleet had not, however, affected by specific shocks and remained essentially unchanged in its various phases with three operating segments: West (Gen. Raoul da Barberino), East (Gen. Ferdinand Raffaelli) and Center (Gen. Wenceslas D'Aurelio). The only change concerned the turnover of two field commanders replaced by Gen. B.A. Raffaelli and D'Aurelio few weeks earlier.

The early volumes of an impending general offensive English had manifested on several occasions because of the many raids carried out on the ports, airports, logistic warehouses; with an increase in the activity of aviation against the WDAF intended to block the tactical reconnaissance of the axis to avoid the sighting of the advanced units and the large number of vehicles transferred to the west near the Libyan border; with a disruptive activities carried out by dropping paratroopers, landings saboteurs, commando raids in the rear; with an intensified radio activity and identification by the new mechanized units and infantry units.

The general concepts adopted by the 5th Air Fleet command foresaw an advanced deployment of units in order to effectively support the actions of ground units of P.G.A. and C.A.M. and also the establishment of fuel depots, explosives and ammunition capable of ensuring in any eventuality an operating autonomy of at least a week.[135]

A twin-engine Ca. 313 of the 64th OA Group. The presence of outdated Ro 37 biplanes was gradually replaced in Libya by the most modern and capable twin-engine Caproni.

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The British attack did not therefore generate any particular reasons for surprise in the Italian commands except to the extent foreseen by the previous symptoms and in the identification of the established day, since the air reconnaissance had reported for several days the British concentrations close to the border, their progressive numerical increase, the advanced locations and the gradual movements of the individual units with a capillary and valuable work such as to provide the ASI Supercommand with the possibility of chronologically informing the Supreme Command of the situation (November 17 had been reported to Rome over 3,000 motor vehicles sighted in the area Sidi Barrani/Marsa Matruk) while the part relating specifically to the WDAF the SIA comforted by the SIM information did ascend to no less than 16/20 the fighter squadrons, just as many tactical support and bombardment units, and a dozen tactical reconnaissance, heavy fighter and torpedo planes, divided between the Western Desert Air Force, the arrears RAF groups 201st and 205th and those of reserve and garrison located in Palestine, Iraq, Aden, East Africa; an evaluation by default because the squadrons of the RAF/ME added up to 54 organic units of flight and air support to the "Crusaders" will initially were assigned 31. According to the organic RAF were available so no less than a thousand aircraft to excluding those spare and repair.

The frantic enemy activity on land and in the heaven was exactly interpreted by the 5th Air Fleet Command as an imminent attack and sign the relevant claim made by aviation command to Supercomando ASI obtained as a natural answer the following general guidelines:

1) maintain the unit forward deployment;

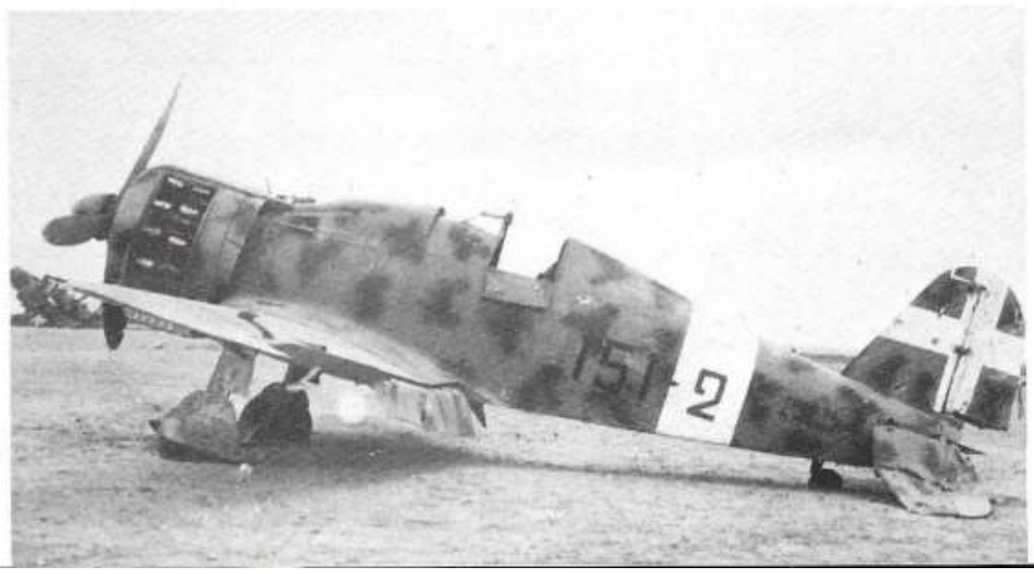
2) maintain fuel supplied at least for at least 5 days of autonomy.

Measures were only partly justified by the situation, because the units stay on advanced fields would expose the staff and the flight material sudden offense of the enemy. Such an eventuality could not find another solution, however, given the shortage of vehicles available to the R.A./Libya and fuel shortages: two elements that prevented the implementation of the RAF method of arrears equipped airfields and those advanced trampoline proved good in many respects.

The fuel shortages severely limited the offensive activities and the only possible activity and indispensable concerned the strategic reconnaissance, tactical observation, surveillance desert, the offensive exploration in the sea with the "torpedo bombers.

The advanced autumn season had aggravated even more the situation of the airfields, many of which were flooded and impassable to the point of preventing take-offs and regular maintenance and refueling with common vehicles.[136]

Sidi Rezegh - A G50 Bis of 20th Group CT surprised by British tank crews on the airfield and put out of action by bursts of machine gun - to the left glimpsed the carcass of a Ca 133



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On the battlefield of Marmarica the German meeting masters Kesselring, Froelich, Gause Chief of Staff of the DAK, Rommel commander of DAK. The fortunes and prestige of the Werhmacht were endangered by the British offensive.

Compared to the situation existing in the same period on the eve of 1940, there had been a clear improvement in the anti-aircraft defense of the camps with the assignment of numerous 20 mm batteries, a more fruitful general defensive experience, a modest and positive increase in the provision of transport and technical vehicles, but for the rest there had been no substantial innovations and what the war in the desert had taught - in the course of two campaigns - did not always allow for the achievement of better results due to the lack of suitable and sufficient means. The airfields were poorly manned and defenseless, and therefore vulnerable to dangerous perimeter attacks with tanks and motorized vehicles, lacked mobile units for intervention, equipment and defensive weapons, suitable shelters for airplanes and staff. Were also frequent interruptions due to sabotage of the Arabs recruited by the British (in the constitution in Egypt was a Libyan Arab Force formed with Libyan Senussi and exiles), the military courts had handed down several death sentences for murder, violence, hostile acts committed against Italian civilians and Axis Armed Forces, and it had been set up an internment camp for Arab facilitators for the British in Sidi Abdul Kerim (Tagiura).

It was a difficult situation and in many respects irreversible, but not enough to deceive many superficial onlookers a glimpse of history and optimistic of winning results without objectively considering the difficulties in North Africa, where an army of about 300,000 men between Italian and German, had live and fight a costly war dramatically tied the slender thread of supplies from Italy, whose tenuous umbilical cord whenever it was cut by the enemy -both even momentarily - inevitably put in crisis Rommel's army.

Opposed to this situation lived and fought the British Army, a viable entity representative of one of the largest and most powerful nations of the world, politically connected, militarily and economically to the United States of America, the world's most powerful industrial nation, connected its rich colonial empire of raw materials, food, and defending human potential in the Middle East of some essential strategic resources, including oil, controlled and monitored at source, in Iran and Iraq, with an annual production totaling 12 million tons, which was to be added to Bahrain in the Persian Gulf (1,000,000 tons per year).

In contrast to such a great wealth of raw materials and war potential, it was a surprising paradox that in Libya the Italian Air Force could not fly its planes as it should due to a lack of fuel, could not, without wanting to, implement the necessary safety measures for the material and physical protection of the personnel due to a shortage of vehicles, had to ration, forced to operate and cooperate with difficult and haughty allies like the Germans, so parsimonious with aid, obey and coexist with absolutist and intractable commanders like Rommel, make its personnel live in the squalid desolation of desert camps devoid of the most basic comforts, without offering anything in return other than the dedication and spirit of sacrifice of the aviators, the sense of duty, obedience to orders received. To further aggravate the situation, there was the replacement of General Pricolo who had long been in open conflict with General Cavallero.

In these difficult moral and material conditions, the 5th Air Fleet of Libya began its second defensive battle to defend Cyrenaica and fight as much as possible, the fiercest opponent. Before the beginning of the attack the WDAF suddenly bombed the evening of the 18th the airfield of Ain el Gazala destroying 10 G.50, 2 CR. 42 and a MC.200. It suffered a serious loss even before it began the "Crusader".

The first day of battle - 19 November - was even more disastrous for the Italian Air Force since the 20th CT Group was almost completely destroyed, surprised on the Sidi Rezegh field by British armoured forces that had penetrated into Marmarica through the Trigh Capuzzo, in an area that had been entrusted to the surveillance of the DAK but which was mysteriously left unguarded by the 33rd Reconnaissance Bn. forward deployed on the Dahar er Reghem.[137]

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The 20th Group CT (Lt. Col. Mario Bonzano) with Sqd. 151st, 352nd, 353rd, located on the Martuba field, had been ordered by the Eastern Sector Command to move on the trampoline airfield Sidi Rezegh east of El Adem, to stock up, and then provide the escort of two SM.79 scouts posted by the 174th Sqd. RST, which were to take off from Martuba to be "join" on the vertical of El Adem by the G.50 escort and then bring in the border area between Bir Khamsa and fort Maddalena to control the situation.

They took part in the mission 22 Fiat G.50 of the 35 equipping the unit, accompanied by a group of specialists on board 2 logistic Ca.133.

At 13:30 all the 24 aircraft had arrived in time on the airport of Sidi Rezegh, where they were decentralized and intending to resupply with the help of airfield staff and the care of the unit specialists for the development of engines and weapons. At about 16:00 they broke suddenly on the field a few Curtiss P.40 that machine-gunned hastily decentralized aircraft over the vast desert rectangle damaging a dozen and burning one that was destroyed. It was a moment of understandable confusion but also the immediate control of the situation that the commander Bonzano picked up doing a quick check on the conditions of men and those of the planes techniques, trying to recover as soon scattered to the sides of the field specialists and ordering the immediate take-off of efficient G.50. A few minutes later, while there was intense preparations appeared on the south side of the field a group of Humber armored cars and light “Stuart” tanks of the 7th Arm. Brigade, arrived unnoticed in the area. These vehicles after a brief moment of hesitation due to the unusual opportunities began to shoot with guns and automatic weapons on aircraft recognized for Italian while armored cars were brought quickly on the south-western perimeter of the field by shooting bursts of machine gun wildly into aircraft and personnel of the 20th Group.

In general and understandable the confusion with the sudden attack, they managed to take off only 3 planes and a couple of trucks quickly gathered the largest number of pilots and specialists including even the commander of the group, then taking the maximum speed on the north side of the field still free in the direction of El Adem, facilitated the escape by the 3 now flying G.50 beginning to strafe the enemy tanks.[138]

To ascertain the serious crisis in N.A. Gen Cavallero arrives in Libya taking over from Gen. Bastico and Gen. Barbasetti. Behind him come at a constant three-engined SM 82 transport with airlift of reinforcements of men and materials.

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Young fascists of the CAM station at Bir el Gobi with an 47/32 antitank - These young volunteers they provided in the "Crusader" an excellent example of courage and firmness of veterans.

The armoured cars directed the bursts of their guns onto the tailplanes to disable the Italian fighters, 18 of which were stranded on the field together with the 2 Capronis that were on fire and the G.50 that had already been destroyed in the air attack. They captured 80 prisoners, including 8 pilots and specialists from the 20th Fighter Group, and among them Capt. Del Prete, commander of the 151st Sqd., seven of whom managed to escape from captivity a few days later when the Pz. Gr. Afrika reconquered Sidi Rezegh and Sidi Azeis. In just two days before the start of the offensive enemy, they had been destroyed 34 aircraft including 29 Fiat G.50; the 20th Group had been severely decimated. As the Italian-German tactical air force was devoted to attacks against armored formations in Marmarica escorted by fighters, bombers - SM.79 part of the 8th Stormo BT and BR.20 of the 13th Stormo were sent to the south Oasis to hinder of advanced Force that Giarabub and Cufra tried to point toward Gialo with strong motorized column of 500 vehicles.

The bombers attacked the convoy on several occasions inflicting heavy losses to vehicles with repeated machine guns and small-caliber AR type bombs. They were lost 2 BR.20 hit by anti-aircraft guns defending the march of the vehicles.

After several days of forced stop due to flooding of the fields, even employees air units from Central Sector took off to integrate squadrons already committed some time.

The evolution of the military situation forced the end of the month the abandonment of the fields to the west of Tobruk and to Gialo threatened closely by the advance of Oasis Force, now in about 300 km. by Agedabia after traveling for 10 days over 600 km of desert trails. Attacks CR.42 B.A. the 376th Sqd. (Capt. I. Lalatta) were brought against British armored vehicles in the El Cuasc area, east of Gambut and Sidi Rezegh area, working for several consecutive days with takeoffs from the airfields of Ain el Gazala frequently subjected to the enemy fighter attacks . To reinforce the few Italian attackers came the 236th assault Sqd. (Capt. A. Cerutti) with CR.42 B.A. (Wing bombs) who had left the Ju.87 survivors of the 209th Sqd. to pass on the biplane Fiat equipped as a assault.

The Armed Forces High Command ASI urged on several occasions the Supreme Command to send reinforcements and aircraft Chief of SMG course was pressuring the Superaereo cause was strengthened adequately the North African front is vital for Italy.

In particular called for the prompt transfer under the CT Wing Libya equipped with the brand new Macchi C.202 long been assigned to the units. On November 18, a first group of the 71st Sqd. Mc.202 (17th Group) now to move to the African use with AS filters, it moved from Ciampino to Comiso (Sicily) waiting to take in Libya as soon as received the transfer order.

From Sicily it moved to Tripoli, the reconstituted 239th Sqd. B.a.T. (Capt. R. Piovano) while in Castel Benito you were completing the 209th sorely tried by the vicissitudes suffered and war, now entrusted to the command of Capt. Ragazzini. On November 23, landed in Castel Benito the first Mc.202 of the CT Stormo from Comiso and in the same day after a summary and control its supply, off again for the field of Wadi Tamet used as a springboard for technical operational area east and later they were moved to Benina and Martuba after the airfield undergoing a flare drop and a warm welcome from the RAF that fortunately caused no harm to people and to the flying material. For the first time since the war began the 1st Stormo CT operated in North Africa with new and more powerful aircraft, the day of the 25th began with the combat in the area of Sidi Rezegh/Gambut finally managing to prevail on this fierce enemy with Hurricane and Tomahawk, 4 of which were considered shot downed at the end of a long and difficult confrontation in the sky of Marmarica.[139]

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[illegible]

TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RESULTS

We have described in detail the new tactical organization put in place by WDAF during the "Crusader" and the large part of the support units of fighter-bombers, light bombers and attackers that the RAF Command for the Middle East managed to prepare, provide adequate flight material, train and employ in the course of the battle, in support of the effort exerted on the ground by tankers, gunners and infantrymen of the 8th Army.

Equally predominantly tactical could be called the air component of the Fuhrer Flieger Afrika with the bulk of its Stukas and Zerstorer (65% of the German air force) that Rommel used profitably for support to DAK with good understanding and excellent results for the operations of the Panzer unit.

The same could not be said in this regard for the Regia Aeronautica similar result, as to a definite theoretical and commendable progress prepared and marked with new criteria and tactical use of collaboration methods between air units and ground units (non-existent at the beginning of the war) it had not been matched by the Italian aviation command summit, a considerable strengthening of the Assault specialty units, if we except the presence of the two squadrons of Ju.87 alternately sent on the east air sector and the few CR.42 with wing bombs used experimentally for the assault but in numbers so small as to doubt the efficacy of the results from such "made do" aircraft was obtainable. In 1941 the Assault specialties, boast the firstborn of Italian aviation, had suffered a serious setback compared to 1940, because it did not have any organic unit after the dissolution of the 5th and 50th Stormo, who had mainly worked with Ju.87 for the precision tactical support but had no suitable aircraft for fast low-flying attack, equipped with powerful armament and with adequate payload to hit and neutralize heavy armored vehicles.

Yet the whole front of North Africa could be considered par excellence the ideal battlefield of armored vehicles and assault aircraft, which in 1941 had been overlooked and neglected in this respect by the GS/RA, now engaged for years in the struggle for a suitable: aircraft for the assault that the Italian aviation industry had not been able to achieve after the striking of the Ba.65, now incapable of further conduct of military operations.

They had concrete hopes on the Re.2002 that Reggiane had extrapolated from Re.2000 fighter, and cultivated a well-founded optimism for the set-up times and production of the new assault that would be short and that soon the aircraft could reach the established assault units of the reborn specialties.

The Luftwaffe was also experiencing considerable difficulties to provide suitable aircraft for aviation tactical support, after the established experience that the "Destroyer" Bf.110 was too slow and cumbersome to operate effectively against heavy armor. The solution, if such it can be called, was found by adapting fighter Messerschmitt Bf.109 as fighter-bombers (Jagdbomber = Ja.Bo.) with the dual result to enable them to attack tanks, batteries, pitched fortified positions and concentrations of vehicles with SC/SD bombs from 50 to 250 kg., and at the same time again have effective and fast fighter immediately after the release of the bomb. But the Bf.109 unlike the Italian aircraft also had the weapons of 20 mm, -it was considerably faster and that possibility did not alienated at the opportunity to also attack armored and armored vehicles with obvious results.

Despite these "arrangements" the German aviation industry was working to prepare assault aircraft with Fw.190 models, Hs.219, Me.210 and also tried to modify the aircraft Stuka Ju.87 by applying a heavy additional armament consists of two Flak weapons mod. 18 to 37 mm, especially in Russia, they would massacre of armed self-propelled artillery and tanks.

The hundred “Picchiatelli" [Ju.87] that Germany had ceded to the Italian Air Force between summer 1940 and spring 1941, after having rendered outstanding services and appreciated by the RA, Sicily, Malta, Greece, Yugoslavia and North Africa , had now dissolved, consumed irreparably from the rapid succession of the conflict and had not been possible to replace or reinstate.

But to better clarify the doctrinal aspects of the Assault Specialty and define what types of aircraft it was necessary to assign, what training criteria to adopt with the tactical intervention methods, it was necessary to clear the field once and for all of any uncertainty in this regard, of mental and prejudicial reservations in order to assign a clear and definitive role to the Air Force in the field of tactical collaboration with the Army units which was still lacking in 1941.[140]

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The monthly average of efficiency, the 5th Air Fleet, which in February 1941 had touched the lowest index with 140 efficient units in charge to the units, was gradually rising in the following months reaching a total of 200 in March, 215 in June, 316 in September and reaching peaks in October and November respectively, with 336 and 324 aircraft in combat effectiveness conditions, and then to go down in December, "Crusader" now in decline, 277 specimens efficient.

In detail and as previously described, there had been the numerical turnaround by the bombing to the fighter with peaks of 34 SM.79 and 30 BR.20 supplemented by 21 Ju.87 for swooping attack with the 86 CR .42, 80 G.50, the 27 MC.200 and 202 recorded between October and November. An increase was recorded also in the field of terrestrial reconnaissance with the presence of about fifty airplanes between Ro.37 and Ca.311 while the APC, denounced a significant low of specimens of the twin-engine "Ghibli" from 38 January to 12 aircraft confirmed in December. Steady the integrated number of maritime reconnaissance but with the tri-motor land based of RS Cant.1007 Bis type. One of the secrets of success of the continuity of action of WDAF in the battles that took place in 1941 in the desert of North Africa, dates back to the ability to power with an uninterrupted flow of aircraft and personnel squadrons of first line, to always maintain units at maximum organic level.

Secret that apparently does not justify the presence of a few squadrons engaged, if not in employment belief at the highest level, which is impossible to achieve for the air forces of the Axis and particularly for RA, often forced to withdraw from the line of Stormi and Groups reduced to negligible numerical entities. Only careful study of statistics on US supplies and reinforcements sent from England, can justify in their full scope and breadth such an important operational aspect.

If you think for a moment to the brief conflict with Syria, which lasted just over a month, you can feel the presence in the field of 15 Squadrons of the RAF and FAA with no less than 350/400 aircraft, but the presence of the British air force in Egypt against the Axis, proved undoubtedly much more significant and important as war industry, deserves much greater attention and organization.

Between January and December 1941, slightly less than 2000 airplanes reinforced the RAF/ME and among these were numbered 1,200 fighters, 600 bombers, 180 transport aircraft; a number that allowed the WDAF to deploy a line of at least 650 fighter/bombers in April, 860 in July, 1100 on the eve of the "Crusader" and feeding with stubbornness and regularity all engaged squadrons.

About 500 of the new planes sent to Egypt were US-made, it had not yet been allies of England, and had allowed the establishment of new units and the application of new tactical doctrines.

In the same period, Italy's ally Germany, had received from the Reich no more than forty Ju.87 to complete the supply of 100 Stukas of 1940, against a total production of 12,401 aircraft registered in 1941 in Germany and among these 3400 bombers, 3800 fighters, 500 Stukas; a parameter which deserves to know and meditate!

To this add after such supplies “lend and lease”: 35.000 trucks, 320 tanks, 300 self-propelled, 170 light tanks, 240 cannons AA., 250 Gunner, 200 cannons AT., Several tens of thousands of tons of war materiel sent to Egypt against the Axis.

LIBYA AIR TRANSPORT

The activity of the SAS and Flight Unit of connections for Libya was explicated in the second half of 1941 by the 148th Group T., which essentially worked with SM.73 under the command of Maj. Mario Ferruzzi took over by Lt. Col. Vincenzo Napoli. The unit had 14/16 planes into two employee squadrons placed under the command of respectively Capt. E. Pellizzari (606th) and Lt. M. Vitalini-Sacconi (605th).

The 145th Group T. was instead permanently assigned to the Libyan transport service along with Sqd. 604th and 610th who already long been operating in North Africa. Was lost in the operations one of the few four-engined SM. 74 still in service with the 604th Sqd. (Capt. B. Trocca) that on October 23 while coming from Castel Benito was preparing to land in Gerbini, clashed due to poor visibility into a mountainous relief causing loss to the complete crew and 26 passengers including soldiers and civilians, who were aboard.[141]

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On November 2, a heavy night raid of the RAF of Castel Benito caused the loss of a second SM.74 and only a four surviving remained in service with the SAS.

Also intense activity of health aircraft equipping the 600th Sqd. T. (transformed on 3/15/42 600thSqd. S.) with three-engined SM.81 and Ca.133 supplemented by Ghibli in rescue version. Among the Cant.506/S of 614th Sqd. S. was lost the I-DOMI on July 22, 1941 for enemy strafing that caused deaths and injuries in the crew.

More multifaceted work of the SM.83 LATI unit flying routine that carried passengers, mail, special materials between Catania and Tripoli flights on a regular basis. More frequent and demanding the use of SM.75 which was equipped with the 145th Group T. assigned to the 5th Air Fleet, which employed mainly with excellent results this type of multi-engine. The nuclei of air communications in the course of the year lost their I-LUSS the 604th Sqd. for enemy raid on Castel Benito.

At the beginning of 1942 there was the entry into service of the first three-engined Fiat G.12, initially assigned to the 148th Group T. carrying troops to Tripoli, materials and special equipment, fuel drums in a journey time on average faster than other aircraft.

But the main transport activity for Libya is carried out mainly with SM.82 of SAS in 1941 had had a remarkable organic growth with the establishment of new units. In addition to 147th Group T. (Maj. Felix Santini), began to operate the connections with Libya on the newly formed 146th Group T. Autonomous (Sqd. 603rd/609th) with a score of SM.82 and now the veteran 149th.

On March 13, a three-engine SM.82 was lost during return after an airdrop of supplies to Giarabub. The entire crew of 6 men died with pilots Lt. G. Mention and G. Ravezzolli.

On May 7 enemy fighters intercepted and felled at sea the SM.82 of Capt. Pieroni carrying 22 specialists of the 239th Sqd. B.a.T. Only 13 survivors were rescued by a rescue boat. Another 5 SM.82 are lost to accidents and war causes during flights into Libya.

At the end of 1941 entered the service with the SAS 18th Stormo T. (Col. Paolo Altan) was born from the transformation of a BT unit to a Transport unit. The Stormo began transports to Libya with 37 Group (Maj. Peter Lauri-Filzi) with the Sqd. 47th/48th located in Trapani, and with a equipment of a mixture of three-engined SIAI -SM.81/82.

In early November it enters service the Stormo with the 56th Group (Sqd. 222nd /223rd) of SM.81 going to reinforce the twin group heavily engaged with 6/8 daily flights to and from Libya. They are lost to accidents 4 SM.82 18th Stormo T. in November alone and one even in December when the three-engined of the 37th Group T. succeed with serious dangers from Benghazi to evacuate the last defenders of the airport as it is about to be abandoned.

The influx of the tri-engines of the SAS to Libya in 1941 reached very high peaks including among 80/110 aircraft daily taking off belonging to 4 organic groups and two autonomous squadrons who lavished non-stop to supply of men, materials and fuel the troops of Libya.

The 145th Group T. for ASI - in the meantime become independent, - began during the year to receive the first MS. 82 in place of proven SM.75, an aircraft allocated more rationally to a communication unit.

The need to evacuate civilians from Libya and the difficulties inherent in this complex exercise suggested to the Supreme Command with Telegram No. 55121 in date 09 August 1941 Services directed to the Air Ministry, to urgently restore the Rome-Tripoli line bringing the races from 3 to 4 weekly, changing also after consultation with the CIAF, the route on the Rome-Tunis- Tripoli route for more guarantees the safety of flights. Simultaneously with this decision, the SAS command put at the disposal of the General Government of Libya the Transport Groups 146th, 147th, 148th and 149th to the movement of civilians and also the OBS command assigned a share of Ju.52 for this exceptional evacuation service from Libya which ended in July 1942 with the transfer by air of 39,553 people mostly women, children, old people. In particular, the 146th Group T. was awarded with its SM.82 the Rome-Littorio/Sicily/Tripoli route, the 147th (SM.82 /G.12) between Rome-Sicily-Cyrenaica-Aegean (occasional extension) the 148th (SM.73 / SM.82 / SM.83) between Lecce / Cyrenaica with extended back up to Milan-Linate and 149th (SM.82) services of the CSIR (if any) and to travel on the route Rome -Tunisia-Tripolitania-Sicily.[142]

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For their transportation needs the 5th Air Fleet command had 2 Sqd. with SM.74 aircraft, SM.75, SM.82 and G.U.A. flight units with several airplane.

On 15 August not arriving in Gerbini the SM.82 (609/5) piloted by Lt. Palermo started from Benghazi to Sicily, probably shot down by the fighters based in Malta.

NAVY

The supplying activities to North Africa in 1941, expressed with the preparation of 352 convoys -from and for Libya-which saw the employment of 903 ships-trip where you need to add the 144 military ships traveling for 112 convoys with naval ships made during the year, with a total of merchant ships used to 5,133,831 tons, of which 336,542 tons were lost to enemy attack. The trips were a total of 740-basis.

It was the highest effort made during the war by the Italian Navy, with a number of monthly convoys that reached the highest peaks in February-March-April to coincide with the Africa Korps, respectively transportation with the use of the merchant ships of 591,375 TSL (February) 668,119 (March) 596,340 (April) and decreases in the following months, back between July-August over 500,000 GRT. and suffer a sharp decline at the end of the year with just over 100,000 GRT. used monthly.

The most loses occurred in September (TSL. 80,764), November (50,103), December (35,771); the lowest in February (TSL. 2,355), March (7610).

The military personnel transportation for Libya had seen a mass of about 160,000 soldiers on the move including 65,645 German soldiers, of which 6,085 (2.7%) non-arrived at their destination together to 8,000 Italian soldiers out of a total of 14,168 people considered missing for war causes (9% of the total transported).

The Air Force had sent 7,183 in Libya between officers, NCOs, and graduated airmen missing for reasons of war, 1,724 men and suffering the largest losses on a percentage (24%).

The material transported by sea ascended to 1,016,442 tons including 240,000 tons, Liquid fuels, with a total loss of tons 163000 between fuels .and various materials. The highest quantity transported in North Africa during the war.

He arrived in Libya for 86% of the cargo on board, 97% fuel, 91% of the material. A result of great importance that highly honors the sacrifices and efforts of the Italian sailors.

The lowest losses were recorded in February (0.4%), the highest in September (24.3%) of the total gross tonnage, used in traffic with Libya.

Enemy actions with bombings on the Libyan coast were 17, the air ones were manifested with 124 raids on Tripoli, 45 on other locations in Libya, 14 on Benghazi.

The Aviation activities for the Navy with an employment of around 400 seaplanes (monthly average efficiency 170-190 aircraft) involved the completion of tasks conducted in 9920 with 43,383 hours of flight and with a mileage of more than the million km. on the Mediterranean sky. They were lost 7 seaplanes to enemy attack and 16 others lost for various reasons: a percentage that will be the lowest of the whole war (0.6%).

The anti-aircraft defenses of Libya and those anti-ship had suffered during 1941 a decrease of potential with respect to the deployment of 1940, decreased mainly due to the loss of important fortress of Tobruk.

The situation of deployed artillery in 1941 was as follows:

coastal batteries	- 8 of 190/39
	- 3 of 152/52
	- 4 of 149/37
	-30 of 120/50
	- 3 of 102/35
Antiaircraft batteries	-18 of 102/35
	- 42 of 76/40

A total of 98 guns of 114 existing in 1940 replenished promptly to cover the losses incurred in Tobruk where they will install in 1940 a good 32 guns AS/AA.

Had increased the number of barrage mines in Libyan waters in the Sicilian Channel, created safe corridors, mined approach areas in Malta, semaphore stations increased from 25 to 28, carried out important work in Tripoli and Benghazi to improve port receptivity and unloading of materials.[143]

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The military ships losses for traffic protection with Libya were: CL. "Diaz" (25 Feb. 1941), "Da Barbian" (13 Dec. ‘41), "Da Giussano" (13 Dec. ‘41); DD. "Tarigo" (16 Apr. ‘41), "Lampo" (16 Apr. ‘41), "Baleno" (16 Apr. ‘41), "Fulmine" (11 Sept. ‘41), "Libeccio" (11 Sept. ‘41), "da Mosto" (1 Dec. ‘41); Torpedo boats, "Vega" (11 Jan. ‘42) "Chinotto" (28 Mar. ‘41), "Schiaffino" (24 Apr. ‘41), "Canopo" (4 May ‘41), "Pleiadi" (31 May ‘41), Submarines: "Salfa", "Smeraldo","Caracciolo"; gunboats: “Valoroso", Cirene" "Bianco," "Grazioli Lante ".

5th AIR FLEET–LIBIA
(War activity period 10 Feb. 1941 / 31 Jan. 1942)

Bomber/Dive bombers

Total aircraft used for actions	n. 1,945
Flight of hours worked	n. 5,240
Tons of bombs dropped	n. 2,050

missions performed:
prepared defensive, airports, roads, warehouses, ports and ships at anchor and at sea, armored / motorized vehicles, land and sea offensive reconnaissance, anti-submarine escort, aircraft research, supplies to isolated garrisons, precision attacks.

Fighters

Total aircraft used for actions	n. 19,390
flight hours performed;	n. 31,640

missions-type performed:
departures of alarm, supervisory cruises, ports protection, offensive, bombing aircraft inventory / transportation / health, protection, motorized columns, maritime traffic surveillance, strafing motion-armored vehicles, airports, offensive reconnaissance, aircraft research.

Torpedo bombers

Aircraft used	n. 78
Flight hours performed	n. 255

offensive missions, offensive reconnaissance, surveillance, research cruises, castaways.

Fighter-bombers

Total aircraft used	n. 840
Flight hours performed	n. 2,160
Kg. Of bombs launched	n. 8,100
fired machine guns	n. 42,100

Attack missions, offensive reconnaissance, machine guns, troop protection[144]

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Strategic reconnaissance Land

Total aircraft used	n. 865
Flight hours performed	n. 3,265

Terrestrial exploration missions, maritime, escort vessels and convoys, aircraft search.

Aerial observation

Total aircraft used	n. 637
Flight hours performed	n. 1,390

Reconnaissance missions, naval coastal escort, aircraft search

Enemy Aircraft downed	Likely	Sure
Bombers	n. 4	n. 3
Fighters	n. 28	n. 135
Torpedo bombers	n. 1	-
Fighters- bombers	n. 1	n. 3
strategic reconnaissance Land.	n. 2	n. 6
Aerial observation	n. 1	n. 1
TOTAL	n. 37	n. 148

For the air defense of Libya

MACA	n. 21
Royal Navy / Milmart	n. 35
Royal Army	n. 12
TOTAL	n. 68

Aircraft lost	Destroyed on the ground	Combat/ A/A fire
Bombers	n. 34	n. 32
Fighters	n. 82	n. 26
Torpedo bombers	n. 3	n. 1
Fighter-bombers	n. 6	n. 3
Strategic reconnaissance Land.	n. 8	n. 4
Aerial observation	n. 14	n. 3
A.P.C.	n. 8	n. 3
Transport (145th Group T)	n. 12	n. 2
Health	n. 6	n. 3
Maritime reconnaissance	n. 6	n. 3
TOTAL	n. 179	n. 80

Damaged aircraft (fighting / A/A fire.)	n. 141
Damaged aircraft (raids, sabotage, attacks on LRDG/SAS airfields, ground forces)	n. 218
Aircraft abandoned / damaged	n. 116
TOTAL aircraft lost for reasons of War	n. 375[145]

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Loss of flight personnel (flight missions)
Officers n. 44
NCOs n. 37
Graduates and specialists n 54
TOTAL n. 135
Injuries n. 126
Loss of ground service personnel
fallen n. 55
injuries n. 144
Missing (presumed captives, shipwrecked at sea, etc.) n. 1,640

General summary of war activities

	flight hours	Aircraft used
Bombing	5,240	1,945
Hunting	31,640	19,390
torpedo bombers	255	78
Fighter/Bombers	2,160	840
strategic reconnaissance land.	3,265	865
aerial observation	1,390	637
A.P.C. (*)	-	-
Libya transport (*)	-	-
R.M. (*)	-	-
	43,950	23,755

(*) No reliable data. This does not include, SAS/1941 data for Libya.

Compared to 1940 (7 months of campaigning until January 1941) the 5th Air Fleet of Libya had in 1941 fewer deaths among flight staff (55% less) but a higher number of people missing for war causes. The decrease of the fallen of the flight units was mainly attributable to decreased use of multi-engine aircraft, while the increased enemy attack and the destruction suffered over the fields and for Commandos attacks, had contributed to increasing the total 162 aircraft lost on the landing grounds. It was instead reduced the number of aircraft on abandoned fields due to improved relief organization, timely evacuation, greater availability of vehicles.

Many of the aircraft reported as abandoned by the RAF command on the fields of Cyrenaica were attributable to the previous retreat and those forcibly abandoned could be considered largely irretrievable or not repairable for subsequent allocation to the flight units.[146]

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It was however significantly decreased the number of enemy aircraft shot down by 42% compared to those accredited to the 5th Air Fleet in 1940, but this decrease was attributed to the improvement of enemy flight material and the increased difficulty to fight on an acceptable plan technological parity, while on the other hand improved anti-aircraft now equipped with more experience and more modern artillery material.

The number of flight hours was slightly increased in 1941 but it is necessary in this regard take into account the wider period of time considered, which reports on a substantial balance plan statistical data of 1941 as regards total flight hours and aircraft used although objectively considering the lack of statistical data for certain specialties: APC, 145th Group T., Maritime Reconnaissance, Rescue. The greatest losses in 1940 were suffered by the bombing were in 1941 assigned to a greater extent in the fight, not only for the increased number of potential specialties, but also and especially to the increased use of fighters in typical air war that was fought into the wilderness to certain unfortunate circumstances suffered (episode of Sidi Rezegh and LRDG attack on Ajdabiya and Wadi Tamet fields) where they were caused the most damage and the loss of at least forty airplanes between CR.42, G.50, MC .200.

The total loss of flight material 375 aircraft - of all types in the workforce - 433 lost at the end of 1940, accounted for 35% of the planes that the 5th Air Fleet was in the workforce in February 1941, which were added to those received later organic units reinstatement or reassignment of complete flight units.

A percentage significantly lower than experienced by aviation in Libya seven months of the 1940-41 campaign when the overall losses amounted to 75% of the workforce of the war of the 5th Air Fleet.

Proportionally the largest increase during 1941 had had to G.50 (400%), increased from 20 units available in February 1941 to 80 established in October; followed in the order SM.79 (12/40), BR.20 (10/30), Ju.87 (10/21), CR.42 (44/86), MC.200 (6/27), Cant .501 (5/12).

A decrease was instead had for Ghibli that specimens from 38 of February, had fallen from 12 in December whereas many twin-engine Caproni had been struck off for service age and replaced by the CR.42, SM.81 and SM.79.

For the SAS in transport, the highest increase was recorded in December 1941 with about 1,200 tons of material transported along with 7,000 persons, a considerable effort compared to 34 tons and 231 persons transported in March to and from Libya. The largest number of passengers between civilian and military occurred in October with more than 18,000 people transported by multi-engine of SAS.

But in the conclusion of the war events that took place in North Africa in 1941, the reality emerged concretely that the Libyan front represented the decisive, determining and fundamental aspect of the Italian war, the only front where it was possible to face and attempt to defeat England and it is deeply surprising that Italy and Germany did not dedicate every strategic, military and productive effort to resolve the conflict with England on the North African front before the industrial power of the United States made its weight felt in the Mediterranean.[147]

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CHAPTER THREE

The war in Italian East Africa
The final defense of the Empire

Attack on Eritrea - Attack on Somalia - The fall of Eritrea - Kismayo - The defense of Amba Alagi -The end of the North-West sector - The fall of the base of Assab - The war in the South-West theater - The final defense of the Empire - The last fight in East Africa - The last days of the aviators in Gondar -Conclusions - A slender bridge in the sky between Italy and East Africa [148]

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Italian East Africa: The attack on Eritrea

On the eve of the English offensive against I.E.A. in early 1941, the deployment of the Italian Armed Forces, comprising about 340,000 men, had been divided into two main war theaters - north with 122,000 men - south with 82,000 men; the two sides were joined at the center by the Central theater forces, which had a length of the shorter front of the other theaters of war in the Goggialm sector and the mass of its combined forces to 142,000 men, divided into a horizontal alignment that reached up to the former British Somalia (East theater) with a antonymous garrison in the Addis Ababa area of about 10,000 national, direct protection of the of the I.E.A. capital.

Since many symptoms detected and the confirmation of the information is identified, the attention of the centralized commands on the theater on which the north was found to contain two Anglo-Indian infantry units: the 4th (Gen. Beresford-Pierce) coming from the Cyrenaica, via Suez, which is located between Kassala and Goz Regeb, and the 5th (Gen. Heat) between Sarsareib and Om Ager, where it had come from Egypt via sea. Further south, to the N.W. of Lake Tana, was also deployed the "Gideon Force with two brigades of East African infantry, reinforced by the "Mobil Gazelle Force" (Col. Messervy) with the 14th Bn. of the Foreign Legion and the 3rd Bn. de marche Chad both controlled by Col. Montclar.

They had been transferred as reinforcement on the Red Sea coast south of Port Sudan, where it had deployed the "Briggs Force" with 2 Inf. Battalion, also a armored unit with the "Mathilda" I tank, field artillery batteries and anti-tank. The armored detachments with Cruiser A.10 and A.13 tanks had been assigned to infantry units in northern Sudan from the 4th and 6th Royal Tanks Regiment.

The English north theater commander was Gen. William Platt acting with the directives of the Imperial Army's top commander in the Middle East, Gen. Archibald Wavell.

News acknowledged by the SIM in East Africa had ascertained among other things, the presence in Somalia of 44 French aircraft divided into 24 Potez mod. 25, 15 Potez mod. 63, 2 Morane and 2 Latecolère flying boat; coastal defenses included four batteries of four pieces in Heron islands, Ouranos and another 4 batteries in Djibouti, with mixed-use anti-ship, anti-aircraft.

Aden coastal defensive situation included 9 batteries in Ras Marbut, 2 at Ras Tarshyne, 1 at Ras Hedjuf, 1 at Ras Jebel Amankal, 1 at Aden-port, 2 at Camp Crater, one at Khor Maksar.[149]

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The air forces of the area included 50 Blenheim bombers, 40 Gladiator fighters, 40 Gordon reconnaissance, Hartbeest, Fury, also used for school/training, and 5 Walrus flying boats. About 30 planes "Vincent" had been struck off and set aside. Altogether they were in Aden about 140/150 aircraft in service.

They were also established 4 large coastal fuel depots with each capacity of 3 million gallons (12 million liters.), who for security reasons had been emptied and divided into 60/70 decentralized small deposits.

The numerical strength of the British forces assigned to the I.E.A. offensive ascended to around 70,000 men with 8 Infantry Brigade (23 Battalion.), 7 field and heavy artillery Regt. reinforced by a group of 4 anti-tank/anti-aircraft batteries, two Tank squadrons and a Armored Car Bn., 10 Sapper Companies., 6 transport Co., five field hospitals and other services sections. The two infantry divisions possessed an armored unit each consisting of a Battalion of "Mathilda" infantry tanks. They were available for the general offensive against I.E.A. 140 artillery pieces, 16 antitank, 48 A/A. cannons and machine guns, 184 tanks, 220 armored cars, 12,500 trucks, 4,500 draft animals.

The RAF was present with 6 Squadrons of South Africa Air Force made up of bombers, fighters and reconnaissance aircraft with Wellesley, Blenheim, Gladiator, Hurricane, Lysander, Hardy, Vincent and Gauntlet (1st SAAF, 14th, 47th, 223rd, 237th and 430th Sqdns RAF). In Port Sudan there was a section of fighters with Gladiator in direct support of Briggs Force. The 6 Squadrons of Sudan were framed in the 203rd Group under the command of Commodore L.H. Slatter.

Italian forces of the northern theater under the command of Gen. C. A. Luigi Frusci, head of the northern I.E.A. arena included: the 1st Colonial Inf. Div. (Gen. Carnimeo) between Karora and Chelamat; to the Red Sea, the 4th Colonial Inf. Div. (Gen. Baccari) in Cheru area fronting the 4th Indian, 2nd 'Colonial Inf. Div. (Gen. Bergonzi) was opposed to the 5th Anglo-Indian in the area of Aicotà; the 42nd Colonial Brigade garrisoned Agordat together with the 2nd, the 43rd Brigade faced the British at Om Ager, the Colonial Bds. 4th, 6th and 61st were deployed to Gallabat-Metemma, the 11th was available as a reserve in Asmara, a CC.NN. Battalion, three Colonial Battalions were in the Uolcait garrison.

The organic of the Colonial Infantry Division was around 6000/6500 natives, roughly 40% of a normal workforce of a English Inf. Div., and consequently the overall amount of armed forces, north of terraced theater to the northern border, while including a total of 56 battalions, had roughly the same numerical entity as the British force, but a more deficient armament and equipment it could certainly not balance the military and technological supremacy fielded by the British. The old Mannlicher rifles or mod. 1891 could also compete with Enfield, but proved more difficult, however, the comparison between the obsolete Schwarzlose or Fiat 35 with Bren machine guns, the Thompson Machine Gun, modern machine guns Bofors; impossible was instead a balanced comparison between the artillery because the antiquated pieces 77/28, 70/15 and 65/17 with a range of about 6/7 km and of no effect as a antitank function that the GSG in the 24 Dec. 1940 memo widely suggested to use against tanks, opposing the modern British 88/27 cannons with range greater than with the actual 11 km and this handicap meant greater support to infantry in the attack and invulnerability for armored vehicles in advancing since it was not humanly possible to oppose the British cruisers tanks with the modest M. 11/39 and useless L. 35 in the northern sector in small numbers framed in the 2nd Cp. II Battalion. (32nd Tank Regt.) and the independent tank Co. originated from the 3rd tank Regiment.

All these irreconcilable difficulties armament of Army units could only be provided for with the massive presence and qualitative aviation, but also this important aspect of military support had serious gaps for lack of aircraft and deficient technical and military characteristics that aircraft possessed in I.E.A.. There was no other alternative at that dramatic moment for the armed forces, the Empire, but to fight with all the weapons available to the military honor and prestige of the flag.

On January 10, there had been held in Addis Ababa a military conference present the most important military leaders of I.E.A., including Gen. S.A. Pinna, meeting chaired by the Viceroy of Ethiopia Amedeo di Savoia-Aosta, and when it was put forward the option of abandoning outposts that were not effectively defensible, in favor of a series of defensive lines resting on sturdy strongholds, hypotheses of this strategic withdrawal that it was not shared unanimously by all participants to the conference.[150]

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While approving in principle the idea of the planned withdrawal to better use available forces and natural defensive barriers, some commanders of the theater had the right to decide case by case depending on the circumstances and events. There were so consequently, considerable delays and partial withdrawals to defended positions are not always appropriate and defensible.

Gen. Frusci saw fit partially but promptly implement the withdraw of Gallabat-Metemma areas, as open and conduct a battle in the valley without adequate support of armored and motorized vehicles, would mean exposing the troops to extremely dangerous vagaries of enemy mechanized forces. Better to deal with the British in the mountains, where the possibilities of resistance and congenial of Italian and colonial soldiers in combat would have been higher and more balanced in strength-armament gap.

Of these directives Gen. Frusci informed Gen. Piacentini Comandante the northern aviation sector - so deployment of air units and ways of participating in battle - they were as close as possible to the operational guidelines of the theater Command.

As of January 10, 1941 the Air Force E.A. situation presented itself in this way compared to 10 June 1940.

	10 June 1940	*10 January 1941*
Ca.133	Sqd. n. 13 with 165 aircraft	Sqd. n. 13 with 104 aircraft
SM.81	Sqd. n. 6 with 53 aircraft	Sqd. n. 4 with 26 aircraft
SM.79	Sqd. n. 2 with 18 aircraft	Sqd. n. 5 with 40 aircraft
CR.42	Sqd. n. 3 with 32 aircraft	Sqd. n. 2 with 36 aircraft
CR.32	Sqd. n. 2 with 34 aircraft	Sqd. n. 2 with 22 aircraft
Ro.37 Bis	Sqd. n. 1 with 13 aircraft	Sqd. No. 1 with 9 aircraft
	Sqd. n. 27 with 315 aircraft	Sqd. n. 27 with 237 aircraft

Of the total number of 1940 the ascertained losses of aircraft amounted to 78 specimens but in reality the number of aircraft lost was 139 units, whereas in the meantime had reached I.E.A. 27 three-engined SM.79 and 34 CR.42. In total losses amounted to 37% of overall strength, were not including 25 transport aircraft Ca. 133, Ca. 148, SM.73 in aviation service with the Empire.

A comparative look at the air forces of R.A. and R.A.F. present in East Africa, it allows us to draw some useful considerations for a better assessment of the military events.

While the R.A. in I.E.A. included antiquated aircraft such as Ca.133 and SM.81 bombers, we should recognize that even in the RAF were present initially even older airplanes and exceeded the mentioned Italian types, such as Vickers 'Vincent' and 'Wellesley', the whose speed was, respectively, below the three-engined Caproni and SM.81, as the Gladiator that could be considered equivalent to the performance CR.42 and SM.79 comparable in speed to "Blenheim" MK1, at the time considered as the best bomber of the RAF present in East Africa not to mention the Ju.86 used as bombers, and of outdated Ju.52 “Valentia” used in transport and certainly less than Ca.148 and SM. 73 used for similar tasks in the RA but with better performance and modern design concepts.

Even under the numerical aspect of the Royal Air Force had an initial superiority and every effort was made to revitalize the bomber and fighter line at least until this was possible, by sending from Italy 28 bombers and 51 fighters that led to approximately 400 the planes used in the I.E.A., were lost to the extent of 98% in the course of war operations.[151]

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I.E.A. Airports categorized

Iscia Baidoa	airport	n.	1
Javello	»	»	13
Dire Dawa	»	»	23
Adi Ugri	»	»	31
Barentu	»	»	32
Bahar Dar	»	»	34
Dessie	»	»	46
Neghelli	»	»	57
Shashamane	»	»	77
Gondar	»	»	79
Agordat	»	»	96
Beledweyne	»	»	174
Asmara	»	»	192
Addis Ababa	»	»	200
Lugh Ferrandi	»	»	226
Tessenei	»	»	250
Jimma	»	»	315
Vittorio Africa	»	»	436
Mogadishu	»	»	469
Massawa	»	»	669
Gura	»	»	712

The adjustments in the front brings on the north theater had led to the abandonment of Kassala, Tessenei, Amba Zaul, Mesfintò, Gallabat, Metemma, Uolcait and new positions, with the geographical coordinates were reported to the northern sector Aviation command.

Information received from Rome indicated that the first target of the English was the Agordat area and alternatively the sectors of Karora-Nakfa Keren-in N.E. Zone, Eritrea.

In this situation the command Aviation E.A. imparted to sector commands employees the maximum guidelines to standardize thought and action in view of the enemy offensive. These guidelines included:

1) Control and Countering of Enemy Aviation;

2) Offensive action with bombing- strafing of enemy ground forces;

3) Direct support in the tactical operations of our troops.

In particular the specific directives reserved to command northern sector provided for the clearing of airfields located in areas to be abandoned (Sabderat, Tessenei, Aicotà, Biscia, Gallabat, Metemmà); intensification of aerial surveys to ascertain the daily positions and enemy movements; preparing forward-deployed fighter to counter the air on Eritrea offenses, implement the necessary defensive measures to protect aircraft from bombing during offensive missions.

The clearing operations despite the very limited time available, took place in an orderly and in a positive way with the recovery of all the material, ammunition and decentralized fuel.

The most irrational attitude of defensive measures issued by the Armed Forces High Command I.E.A., it concerned a theoretical examination of the operations to be carried out on the north theater, configured in contrast to the reality of the various operating segments of the theater itself, so connect with appropriate defensive measures-Barentu Agordat the airfield in the middle, with those of Cheren to the north and Gondar to the south, an aspect that on several occasions Gen. Frusci requested several times to Supercomando AOI but did not have assurance and consensus to ensure a reduction of the territory to defend, indeed impossible to achieve with the forces and means available, a more rational and effective defense of the nerve center of the northern arena.

The delayed implementation of these necessary measures throughout the empire, delayed irrationally absurd and demagogic intention to "defend to the last centimeter the I.E.A. territory", caught by surprise the southern arena, involving consequently the central and a small part of the north of Eritrea, with dire consequences and catastrophic results that prevented the planned implementation of the ambitious but achievable in part defensive plan in the "reduced strategic Empire", approved at that time.

Only in the sector of Gallabat- Tessenei, promptly oriented in the operation of evacuation, it was possible to withdraw the troops neatly, save all material (18,000 soldiers and 60 guns), rearrange the extent of new positions of the line. The region of Amara was duly passed by the theater to the northwest.[152]

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Of all the Armed Forces of I.E.A. the aviation was the only Armed Force to reinstate some of its offensive potential, because while the Army and the Navy had suffered considerable losses without any possibility to replace them, the Air Force while in the bitter realization that they have lost more than 1/3 of its original size, it had the opportunity, thanks to the continuous efforts and pressing of the GSA and the brave SAS crews, to strengthen with more modern aircraft SM.79, Ca.133 and SM.81 the bomber component (3 squadrons of SM.81 were transformed with SM.79) while improving the fighter specialties with a greater presence of CR .42 compared to out dated CR.32.

This was the maximum that was possible to do, and in the following months it was possible to have only another 5 SM.79 and 15 CR.42 before the fall of Kufra and Auenat making it more difficult to send other planes to I.E.A.. The last attempt to send fighters was done in late March, but the SM.82 carrying a CR.42 in the fuselage, aborted take-off at Wadi Tamet and was damaged, and the fighter was recovered and incorporated into 18th Group CT.

The decreased efficiency of R.A. Instead he reflected the increased offensive capability of R.A.F. and S.A.A.F., with 18 squads present in East Africa with a total strength of 320 aircraft of the line, supplemented by a hundred auxiliary airplanes between connection, transportation, trainers.

The situation of the RAF and SAAF on the eve of the offensive was as follows:

KENYA

2nd Sqdn. SAAF with Hurricane divided between the air fields of Nayuki, Lokitaung, Marsabit.

3rd Sqdn. SAAF with Hurricane with detachments at Nairobi, Mombasa, Lamu, Bura.

11th Sqdn. SAAF with Fairey Battle stationed at Archer's Post.

12th Sqdn. SAAF with Ju.86 at Nairobi.

14th Sqdn. SAAF with Maryland at Garissa.

40th Sqdn. SAAF with Hartbest at Garissa, Ndege's Nest, Bura.

50th Sqdn. SAAF (Valentia, Lodestar, Ju.52, D.H. Dragon) at various fields of Kenya.

60th Sqdn. SAAF of Avro Anson at Nairobi.

34th Sqdn. SAAF: (Coastal Command) with Anson at Mombasa, Dar es Salaam.

1st Sqdn. SAAF with Hurricane and Gladiator at Port Sudan and Azosa.

14th Sqdn. RAF Blenheim at Port Sudan.

47th Sqdn. RAF with Wellesley at Gordon's Tree and Blackdown.

223rd Sqdn. RAF with Wellesley at Summit.

237th Sqdn. RAF with Hardy and Lysander at Blackdown.

430th Sqdn. RAF with Vincent and Gauntlet at Azosa. Gladiator sections in Port Sudan and Swordfish in Khormaksar.

8th Sqdn. RAF Blenheim at Adem/Khormaksar.

94th Sqdn. RAF with Gladiator at Sheik Othman.

203rd Sqdn. RAF Blenheim at Khormaksar.[153]

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The Cunningham's offensive against I.E.A. included a quick start and quick conclusions before the big rains of May started.

A first attempt at the border of Kenya which presupposed the uprising of border populations had gone completely failed, and the 1st South Africa Inf. Div. had to give up other initiatives in the field, waiting for a more favorable opportunity that presented itself only at the end of January with an attack on forces to Somalia.

Somalia was thus the first of I.E.A. Italian colonies under attack, probably because in the opponent's information, was the largest, the most vulnerable, the least defense, the less important strategically.

You could add in all the gaps identified above, a modest presence of air units, it was unable to protect the flying material from enemy air attacks to the particular characteristics of the territory, the lack of secure shelters in the case of Somalia, and fields equipped to decentralization, the difficult climatic and environmental conditions in which the soldiers had to live and fight and for the preservation of aircraft exposed to the hot weather and the rains.

On the Italian side there were no substantial changes, and the air force of the North theater remained unchanged, since the loss of the 25th Group BT sent to the southern sector, was offset by a temporary stay of the 44th Group BT. The efficiency of the flight material was improved with the division of SM.79 of the 28th Group BT shed its residues SM.81 to the 25th leaving for Somalia. The squadron of MS. in conjunction with the autonomous 41st group BT "Gasbarrini" commanded by Lt. Col. Antonio Gasbarrini former commander of Massawa airport, receiving outdated Ca.131 flight material left by the 25th Group.

For the fighter occurred transferring the 412th Sqd. from Otumlo to Agordat and the 413th from Assab to Gondar.

From January 4 to 17 were destroyed on the ground 17 planes, 3 were lost to accidents and 24 others had been damaged by enemy attacks.

January 27 with 192 aircraft still in charge of the Empire Air Force, there were only 82 efficient aircraft. At that date the I.E.A. aviation force was of 9,140 men (4,950 national and 4,190 colonial), an increase of 2,759 men compared to the organic ascertained on June 10, 1940, increase constituted largely by colonial and militarized workers.

On January 16, there was the withdrawal from Kassala and Tessenei that ordered prematurely and without warning like that of Gallabat, appeared with a lot of clutter to the point of inducing Gen. Platt to anticipate the offensive by two weeks and as a result of the advance implemented in a flat area with motorcycle-armored vehicles, the 41st Colonial Brigade was caught in retreat, attacked, divided and largely forced to surrender. It was necessary to send reinforcements with national motorized squads and PAI, the 11th Grenadiers of Savoy Regiment, a co. of enrolled volunteers from the Germans crews stranded in Massawa. Alarmed by the enemy offensive the theater command did intervene with aviation bombing enemy concentrations in the area Accai losing in the course of operations 13 aircraft.

It was the most severe loss was recorded in a single day over the course of the war since the anti-aircraft reaction turned out a lot more intense than previously and damaging many aircraft. Were lost 3 CR.42, 4 between SM.79, and Ca.133, a SM.81 crashed for mechanical causes. Another 5 aircraft were damaged so severely that they were considered a war loss.

Previously they had been killed in fighting in the area of Aroma a Gladiator and a Hardy by CR.42 of the 412th Sqd. CT, a Blenheim had been attacked on Giggica by S. Lt. Veronese of the 410th Sqd. and forced a disastrous landing in French Somaliland.

From the British side there was the bombing of the Barentu and Agordat airfields and the Caproni workshops of Mai Edaga.

A SM.79 bombers attack had been carried on the railway of Port Sudan and other attacks in the area and Gallabat Metemma where the British were reactivating the airport south of the locations.

The first signs of the impending British offensive against the I.E.A. were recorded on 11 January 1941 and the Armed Forces HQ War Bulletin n. 218 signaled an episode of motorized vehicles on the border with Sudan. Enemy Air strikes were made on Massawa, Gallaibat, Assaib, Giggica, Berbera, Dire Dawa, Gura, Toselli, Gorai, Tertale. Moiale, Mega, Neghelli, Oboch, Asmara and numerous other locations in I.E.A.[154]

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Bombing and strafing by Italian aircraft occurred on Port Sudan, Makeir, Sciusceib, Kassala, Tehilla, Cheru, Aicotà, and various locations in Sudan and Kenya.

In January, they were attacked 12 enemy locations, supported 4 dogfights, suffered 34 raids in various I.E.A. locations, destroyed or captured two enemy planes, 6 shot down in dogfights, 5 destroyed by A/A defenses.

The arrival of the SAAF Squadrons with Hurricane marked a turning point in the context of the air war fought up to that time in East Africa and from that moment the R.A. began gradually and irreversibly to expire the efficiency until to be consumed materially into nothing.

On January 20 three-engined SM.79 attacked British motorized columns near Wachai and Karu to slow the advance towards Aicotà occupied the same day and CR.42 contributed to the defense by strafing vehicles on the Karu-Biscia track.

On the 21st occurred an episode of value extraordinary when a squadron of cavalry commanded by indigenous Amara and led by two Italian officers attacked at a gallop a Regiment of English artillery in the narrows of Kern forcing the crew to shoot at zero with the guns and riflemen to reject a short distance from the pieces the Squadron survivors which had 23 dead and 16 injured on 70 that made it up.

Among the fallen Lt. Togni who was decorated with the M.O.v.m.

Even the occupation of Biscia was opposed by Italian bombers and ground situation became chaotic to the point that RAF planes strafed the "Gazelle Force" vehicles. The 1st SAAF fighters Sqdn. is moved on January 21 to Kassala to increase its operational autonomy. The 22 fighter planes in the sky of Keru and killing 1 Ca.133 by Hurricane intercepted in turn by CR.42s. In the 23rd a section of the SAAF Hurricane was moving on the field of Tessenei and the same day Italian bombers were attacking motorized divisions between Aicotà and Melà.

The commitment by the Air Force in the northern sector during the period January 20 to 31 to counter the British offensive against Cheren paid a heavy price since in the short span of 10 days were lost to war causes and flying accidents 15 among fighters and bombers, while another 24 were damaged more or less severely.

Ca.133 and SM.79 bombers attacked enemy columns and field positions at Aicotà, Auasciafit, Gallabat, Metemma, Tessenei, Keru, Zeriba, Laquatat, Chibabo and Senero and the bombers had often to defend themselves against Gladiator attacks and Hurricane often thwarted by CR.42. 8 between bombers and fighters were lost in combat or fell under - indentation for damage sustained in the clashes.

For its part, the RAF made a great business almost entirely by the South African squadrons, who attacked as a priority the airfields Eritrean Gura, Asmara, Mai Edaga, Adi Ugri, Agordat, Akaikatu, as well as providing a direct support to the 4th and 5th infantry Divisions committed against the Italian defensive line.

Three of British bombers and fighters were reported shot down by Italian and another 5 fighters were more or less seriously damaged. On the 25th the 4th Div. Anglo-Indian had stood in front of Agordat while the 5th was in the Barentu area and the "Gazelle Force" had reached Biscia.

Between 26 and 31 January the R.A. continued exonerating attacks with bombers and fighters between Barentu, Algheden, Aicotà, Tessenei, Ducamba, Gallabat, Metemma, Zeriba, Chibabo, Senero without loss of aircraft and the RAF meanwhile attacked several times the airports of Gura, Adi Ugri, Mai Edaga destroying or severely damaging 4 SM.79, 2 SM.73, 4 SM.81, 4 CR.42. British aircraft also reported damage in aerial combat and among them Gladiator, Wellesley, Blenheim and Lysander. A Westland "Lysander" forced landing near Barentu was captured intact.

The increasing British pressure on advanced Barentu strongholds (6,000 men, 32 cannons and 36 between L tanks and armored cars) and Agordat (12,000 men, 46 guns and 24 light tanks type L.) foretold an imminent attack by forces from two sides.

These disturbing news was added a great psychological importance and political event since the third decade of January the Negus Ailè Selassie in Ethiopia was penetrated by the restless Goggiam border with British troops and Ethiopians partisans to reach the base designated Monte Bolaya to serve as a center of attraction and collection of Abyssinian patriots.[155]

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February 1st, was accentuated more pressure on Cheren on which flocked the remains of the Italian Agordat garrison strafed insistently by the SAAF Hurricane Sqdn. that foiled an attack on among other units of the Indian 5th Inf. Div. conducted by SM.79 bombers.

On February 1st, the I.E.A. aviation possessed 82 efficient aircraft including 29 fighters, two land scouts and 51 bombers between modern and outdated. The 110th Sqd. R.T. now almost devoid of Ro.37 Bis was reinforced with the ceding of 4 CR.42.

Enemy attacks had occurred in the area of Om Ager and the garrison had to withdraw in the area Tolè-Az Darò in Western Tigray. It was also necessary to evacuate the besieged garrison of Amba Quarà isolated few weeks and only replenished by air to food and medicine. Only February 2 the withdraw movement could be considered concluded with valid aviation support which kept at a safe distance Abyssinian irregular bands and British motorized units with machine guns and bombing, providing among other things to supply food, ammunition and medicines to the column that disengaged from Amba Quarà with numerous air drops of supplies essential to the survival of mankind and pack animals.

In early February aviation English strengthened its presence in the field of Cheren intensifying its activities.

Were bombed and machine-gunned the airports Makallè, Bahar Dar, Afmadow and Gura but the Wellesley bombers and the Hawker Hurricane fighters were attacking by the Italians and lost 4 fighter aircraft against 8 Ca.133/SM.79 destroyed on the ground and 3 CR. 42 killed in clashes and belonging to the 412th Sqd. CT. Since February 4 it was completely reactivated by the SAAF the Agordat Airport also used by Wellesley bombers and by Hartbest of the 223rd and 237th Sqdns. which repeatedly attacked Italian troops around Cheren.

15,400 men between national and colonial, 60 guns and mortars, 2,900 pack animals and 1,500 tons of materials had been evacuated from Tigray and now is made available for new uses.

The RAF had moved forward on Sadberat and Umtali airfields to have more autonomy and prevent Italian aviation attacks in the rear of the Sudanese border.

Between 10 and 17 January were lost 17 aircraft and the initial force was reduced to 81 efficient aircraft between SM.79, SM.81, Ca.133, CR.42 and CR.32. The 110th Sqd. R. T. had virtually ceased to exist and the Ro.37 survivors had been supplemented by some CR.42s.

The limited availability of fuel for the existing fuel in I.E.A., had greatly reduced the allocation for aviation that could be relied on only 20 tons of petrol and 10 tons of diesel fuel monthly totally inadequate for the countless needs of the units, services, repairers.

In late January the situation created in the north and in the south attacked simultaneously, had caused a command restructuring, the available forces and service skills by creating other two operating theaters of war: the Juba sector obtained with the ceding of the southern part of the south theater now reduced from Dolo to the Blue Nile at the Sudanese border and west sector which covers the southern area of the north and west theater of the eastern sector, which included the Goggiam, Amara, Shoa, Addis Ababa, Dessie, Gondar.

The northern theater included Adua, Massawa, Asmara, while the east of the larger territorial size included much of eastern Somalia, Somaliland, Harrarino, Ogaden, Migiurtinia, Aussa, Danakil, Arussi, Eastern Shoa.

The enemy threat looming north -in Eritrea -it had induced: Air Force Command for the I.E.A. - air to send reinforcements and isolated personnel - taking them from other less busy units: SM.81 of the 4th Group BT, SM.79 of the 44th bis, CR.32 of the 410th Sqd. CT from Dire Dawa with commander Ricci.

The latter unit had sent reinforcement 5 old Fiat biplanes and one of these had lost their lives during an unequal air combat-one against five -the Sergeant Major Enzo Omiccioli decorated with a gold medal for valor.

Another duel even more disproportionate -one against nine - was perhaps irrationally but undoubtedly faced with great courage and determination, Sergeant Major Veronese, also of the 410th, brave pilot who did not hesitate to attack the Squadron Leader (Squadron Commander) of a formation of 5 Hurricane damage the enemy aircraft and forcing it to land, but being shot down, however, miraculously saving himself by parachute.[156]

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It was not more humanly possible to do with a few more efficient airplanes, the available material and the modestly small number of airplanes existing competitive in I.E.A.

While a small group of excellent fighter pilots performs miracles of skill and talent by shooting down indifferently Blenheim and Battle, Wellesley and Gladiator, Hurricane and Martin, the crews of bombers and particularly of Caproni were literally sacrificed on board antiquated planes and mostly patched up, defenseless and unsuited to modern warfare which necessarily -like it or not slow - were forced to make do in Ethiopia.

Gamba, Piva, Pierotti, Pezzi, Bartolotti, Giardina, Soffritti, Veronese, Ricci, Palmera, De Micheli, Parmeggiani, Lucertini, Raffi, Santoro, Mottet, Malavolti, Veronesi, De Geronimo, Pasti and many other airmen together with specialists, airmen, the militarized personnel who had worked miracles and sacrifices in abundance to allow the Empire Air Force to fight, defend and offend every time if the opportunity presents, men who had well deserved the gratitude and recognition of the duty to history in a lost war and fought with almost nothing, improvised, invented but hard fought as hundreds of dead, wounded and missing testified unequivocally.

The British attack the strongholds of Barentu Agordat and started gradually growing in the day on January 25 ended on February 2 with the conquest of the two locations hit by motorized infantry, tanks, cannons and with the decisive support as always by aviation.

The attack was violent and massive cost to the Italian troops and the loss of much of artillery, trucks and L.35 and M.11 tanks used to no avail against heavy 'Mathilda' who destroyed them systematically, one after another, outside their modest firing range.

The intervention of the RAF was decisive for the success of ground attacks since many northern sector planes were neutralized on Eritrea bases and particularly in Gura and Asmara prime, Macallè second time when it was possible for the SAAF expand its radius of action with having the airfield of Barentu which was only 280 km as the crow flies; the tactical support to the troops of the two Anglo-Indian divisions was secured with bombing and strafing that helped to bring down any lingering moral and physical strength of the Italian defenders.

The collapse of the Barentu - Agordatline defensive front in Asmara was based on strongholds headed by Cheren and namely Adi Ugri and Euda Selassiè on which passed the roadway for heavy vehicles from Agordat to N.W. of Adua and south sides surrounded by high mountains and easily defensible. A serious loss was the destruction of the ammunition magazine depot of Decamere hit by enemy bombers with the loss among other things of 354,000 shots for artillery caliber from 65/17 to 149/13 and of some hundreds of thousands of cartridges for small arms, which prejudiced the regular flow of supplies to the front.

They flocked to Cheren from Barentu/Agordat - 16,400 men of the 18,000 that made up the total of the two principals, 4,300 draft animals, 96 guns, 230 machine guns, 141 vehicles, 15 L.35 tanks, 9 M.11/39. They were lost about 50 artillery pieces many of which are very old bronze guns, dating from the last century, about thirty tanks of light and medium, thirty old AZ.31 armored cars and more than 450 precious vehicles were abandoned for the technical impossibility of getting them to run off road.

In February the activities of the RAF and SAAF manifested itself with tactical support operations in northern Sudan (Kassala area, Gallabat, Cheren) and in southern Kenya on the border with Somalia. Raids were carried out against our air bases, logistics centers, warehouses and moving units, aircraft attacks against the most important cities were recorded in Mogadishu, Massawa, Assab, Asmara, Keren, Hargeisa, Javello, Adi Ugri, Addis Ababa (airport), Dire Daua.

Our aviation totally committed to support the resistance of the land units, it intervened with bombing and strafing around Cheren and lower Juba, where they fought until the evacuation of Kismayo and Mogadishu. For the first time since the conflict began in I.E.A. to start from February, due to the shortage of tri-motors, no attacks bomber on enemy locations of any importance were brought.[157]

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Only British naval units that had appeared in front of Mogadishu were attacked.

Many were shot down in aerial combat, according to the Bulletin of War Information, 14 enemy aircraft while another 15 were destroyed on the ground and 17 felled by the A/A defense particularly by the Royal Navy.

The war bulletin of the HQ of the Armed Forces n. 256 of 18 February noted verbatim:

"The Empire Air Force, for the contribution of audacity and blood generously gave the start of operations, and particularly for the bravery and sacrifice went out of the recent battles in the sky has earned the admiration of the Italian people."

A proper and appropriate recognition that rewarded all the sacrifices offered by aviators of I.E.A.

As of 1 February had disappeared from the line in 40 days of fighting 60 aircraft of all types and airpower had been reduced to 186 of the first aircraft including 65 war efficient and 120 being repaired between the SRAM and the aircraft manufacturer. Moreover, the abandonment of advanced fields used as a landing grounds by the RAF allowed the British fighters of advancing smoothly on rear bases and hitting more frequently planes and materials on the known fields and those of decentralization.

On 20 February, in order to safeguard the remaining aviation potential, Gen. Pinna ordered a retreat to the interior of the advanced units starting from the bases of Asmara, Gura, Massawa and Mogadishu but the lack of adequate means of transport did not allow the transfer of all material located on the bases that would have been left in place and destroyed at the time to evacuate the same bases. In his report to the GS/RA Gen. Pinna concluded: "... the order to resist at any cost by cooperating with the troops until the last efficient unit and then to frame in the battalions and squadrons companies and fighting groups dissolved for the defense of the Empire's territory. "[158]

E.A. Air Force Commander Gen. Pietro Pinna talks with military leaders. The Empire Air Force was divided into four theaters of war to support land operations.

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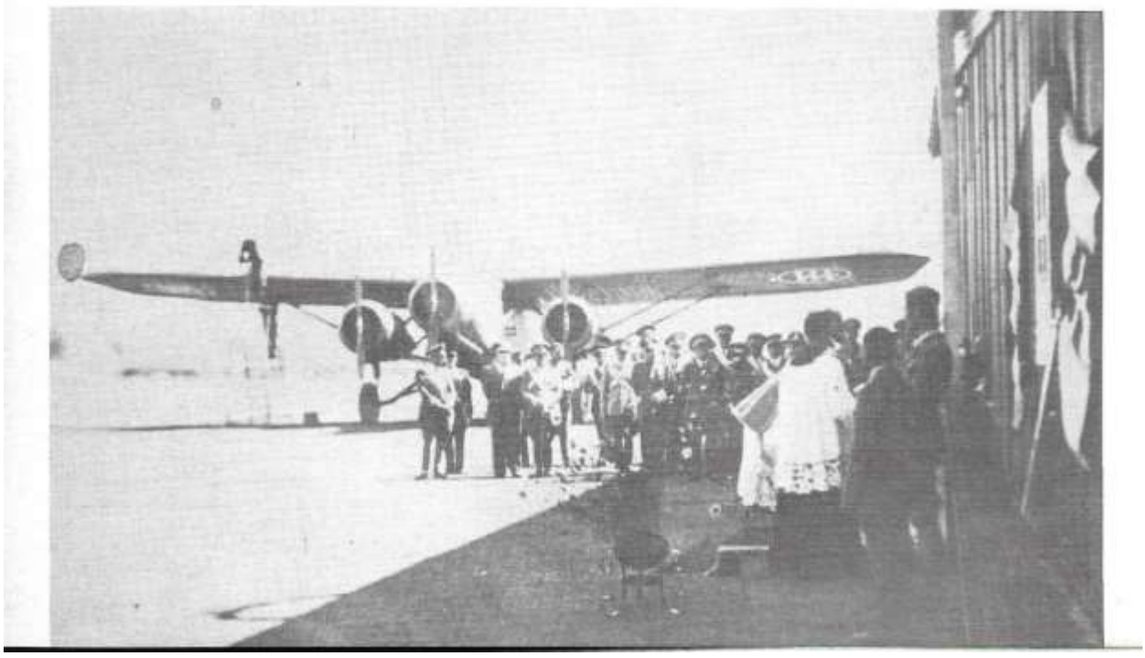
March 28, 1941 - Celebrates on the airport of Dessie the XVIII anniversary of the Royal Air Force establishment. An old Ca. 133 is emblematic of the flight material with which the Empire Air Force operated.

Almost entirely destroyed by the war the flying material, the E.A. pilots continue to fight in the Azzurri Battalion to provide as infantrymen their contribution to the defense of the empire



In March, the RAF and SAAF used the abandoned fields of Tessenei, Agordat, Aicotà, Af Abed and such extremely dangerous activity for the protection of the remaining aircraft equipment, causing the retreat of Dessie of what aircraft remained on Gura airports, Asmara, Massawa, Machallè and Adi Ugri on which there were only a few fighters for local defense.

The northern Aviation sector had lost to 31 January 20 aircraft between shot down, destroyed on the ground, and lost for technical reasons, and 24 others were seriously damaged; a total of 44 airplanes was considered lost or war inefficient in 13-day battle in the only sector of Cheren/Agordat.

On February 1st, in a telegram sent by the Viceroy to the GSG Air I.E.A. the situation was dramatically described with the bitter realization of having 82 efficient aircraft of the line, namely:

SM.79	n. 7
SM.81	n. 6
Ca.133	n. 37
CR.32	n. 14
CR.42	n. 15
Ro.37	n. 2
SM.82/B	n. 1

and adds verbatim: "... To place in preliminary survey what are currently on all fronts used by the enemy in a very significant numbers fighter aircraft of type Hurricane & Gloster.[159]

Attacked Somalia from the south, the Viceroy Amedeo of Savoy-Aosla rushes in flight to Mogadishu to control the situation, the greeting of Gen Pinna at departure from Addis Ababa - from behind the flight aide Maj Tait.

Start of the battle for Cheren - An M.11/39 tank marching to counter the British offensive against E.A. The enemy technological superiority was soon to prevail over the value of the Italian soldier.

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In a relaxing interval the aviators of E.A. engaged in an unequal comparison by the opponent they were inexorably overwhelmed by the number, technological superiority, by the continuity of the activities.

The use of the Ca.133 has become virtually impossible without strong escort fighter. Given this situation, I would point out that, if continuing operations and preserve aviation employment rate maintained in the current period, it is expected that within 15 days the Empire Air Force must be considered without appreciable combat effectiveness."

"Recalling thus again attention to the urgent need to immediately send adequate number of aircraft in I.E.A. to address the situation which has become very difficult. Faced with this state of affairs can tell to have studied the establishment of a division "Azzurra" which will be composed of national military and indigenous people belonging to the Royal Air Force. The division would be used in ground operations alongside comrades of the armed forces of which will be proud to share the fate". The establishment of the Division “Azzurra” of the Regia Aeronautica AOI, whose official birth must take place on the date of 1st February 1941 (authorization by Stamage no. 42563) was the Duce's response to the proposal made by the Viceroy Amedeo of Aosta to the head of government.

Meanwhile the events follow closely and the "door to the south," now open enemy invasion, opponents were spreading to the regions of Central and Eastern and West, since the African 11th Inf. Div. exploiting the success achieved in Somalia moved with very long march from Mogadishu to Giggica (640 km) without finding appreciable resistance from Italian as following the orders of the High Command Armed Forces I.E.A., units withdrew to concentrate in the more easily defensible regions.

The result of the enemy's regular troops trailed by a rabble of irregular Abyssinian, mostly Shifta for years addicted to banditry, who had sensed the occasion offered to them by the British, the opportunity to reintegrate in Ethiopian affairs with a semblance of legality fighting Italy.

February 3, fell in combat on Gondar the pilot M.llo Enzo Omiccioli of the 410th Sqd. CT Autonomous temporarily assigned to the 412th. To the memory of the brave officer it was assigned M.O.v.m. amply deserved the sacrifice offered in an unequal struggle sustained against overwhelming opponent.

To reinforce the garrison of Cheren now threatened by at, they were made to move the 11th Grenadiers of Savoy Regiment from Addis Ababa, a colonial Brigade, 2 groups of cavalry and a group of artillery, the “Uork Amba” Alpine Battalion: total colonial 9 Battalions, 5 national Battalions, two groups of artillery, a battery of 81mm. mortars and antitank guns, engineers and service companies. [160]

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A Grenadier of Savoy guards a Air Force depot of bombs in E.A. in the background a Ro37 Bis of the 110th Sqd RT. of Capt. Palmera

The "Cheren" sector command was given to Gen. Nicola Carnimeo.

The attack on the advanced stronghold of Cheren began on February 2 with the participation of three enemy brigades with 200 cannons, and the support of a hundred aircraft and lasted with ups and downs until the 13th with the objective of the high peaks that surround Cheren: Monte Sanchil, Punta Forcuta, Monte Dologorodoc, the narrows of Dongolaas, where national and colonial soldiers faced, repelled, attacked and defended the areas entrusted to them for several days, fighting under violent artillery fire and continuous bombing and aerial strafing by the RAF, which repeatedly attacked Cheren on a daily basis, causing heavy losses among the population and soldiers.

In one day of February 4 they were lost for reasons of war 8 Ca.133 and 3 CR.42 and what remained of efficient to the I.E.A. aviation were 71 aircraft of all types including 29 Ca.133 of modest military utility.

A bold action of bombing the airport of Khartoum was made personally by Gen. Piacentini who piloted a Ca.133 with pair of bombers.

The two aircraft came by night, and Piacentini approached the field as if he wanted to land, the British turned on the lights and the two Caproni dropped bombs and strafed buildings, airplanes, anti-aircraft batteries. Then with a quick pull-headed for Eritrea. The surprise was fully successful!

The tenacious Italian resistance and repeated counter-assaults forced the Anglo-Indian brigades to retreat to the starting points after suffering heavy losses. The 4th Anglo-Indian Div. was sent to Ghedaref for reconstitution.

More to the south, part of the 5th Inf. Div., The "Gazelle Force", and Sudanese units with the support of forty guns faced the ridge of Arresa while further north began the offensive of the Briggs Force and a de Gaullist Brigade from Port Sudan with the support of two squadrons of bombers and fighters they crossed the Eritrean border, occupied Karora and down south towards Cheren on Alghena-Anseba-the pass of Mescelit road and on the coastal area towards Mersa Taclai-Massawa-Nakfa. A double jeopardy was then taking shape for Eritrea now threatened from three sides with the clear intention of the English to isolate the northern theater by the sectors Uolcait-Tembien places south of Asmara.[161]

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The second offensive cycle against Cheren had the duration of one month and lasted from 14 February to 14 March.

On the morning of 11 February the CR.42 of the 412th Sqd. CT clashed with British fighters in the Cheren area dueling between clouds and mountain peaks, and two pilots were short of petrol landed off the airfield. The commander of the squadron -Capt. Mario Visintini - decided to go and guide them up to Gura, the squadron's base, and from there later onto the airfield of Asmara on which had to land, refuel and for safely dispersed.

Party in difficult weather conditions and visibility - Visintini an Italian I.E.A. fighter ace with 16 shoot downs accredited - because of low carpet of clouds that forced him to a lower altitude where he collided with Monte Nefasit being killed on impact. To his memory he will be granted M.O. v .m., for the brave conduct of the war for the numerous actions undertaken, including the successful mission of Goz Regeb on 12 December when they were shot down five enemy planes, for the rescue of Capt. Raffi commanding the 412th Sqd. CT and forced to land in enemy territory for damages incurred in the action who was saved by Visintini who landed next to him to load him on his plane and bring him to safety under the nose of the British who were rushing to take him prisoner.[162]

In the fighting for the defense of Cheren and Capt. Mario Visintini falling as a result of a flying accident E.A. Air Force ace with 16 aerial victories was decorated with the M.O.v.m,

The Asmara Military Cemetery. The ceremony for the military burial of Capt. Mario Visintini. Present Gen. Frusci, R.E north theater commander and Gen. BA Pietro Piacentini.

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The sudden and unexpected death of Capt. Visintini was a great loss for the Italian Air Force and especially for the AOI.

The justification of the M.O. v .m. assigned to Capt. Mario Visintini of the 412th Sqd. CT Autonomous sounded so: "Proud son of Italy, heroic, indefatigable, indomitable, on all Empire skies put down the arrogance of enemy air action in fifty victorious fights during which felling sixteen opponents and took part in the destruction of thirty-two planes in the attack against heavily armed enemy bases. In heaven and on earth was his opponent's dismay, the symbol of the heroic victory for tending to win his place in the world."

An exemplary figure of aviator and pilot who deserves to be remembered and honored.

British troops concentrated in the valleys at the foot of the mountains that surround Cheren already attacked previously, were subjected albeit sporadically on air bombardments, particularly in the valley of Bogu and on the slopes of Mount Faleston and Mount Sanchil from which they had been driven away by victorious attacks.

A number of enemy counterattacks unleashed with artillery support who fired 7,000 shells per hour, were rejected by the Italians with severe you lose on both sides.

The afternoon of the 10th, two Italians intercepted British fighter bombers who attacked the Dongolaas narrows, but the first gusts of the Blenheim increased speed and disappeared to the west. The 2 CR.42 then dropped on the road of Bogu and strafed on two occasions English positions; then with a short country transit they greeted the Ascari and revelers made their way to Asmara. In view of a new and more massive offensive against Cheren it proved so tough, poured fresh new units with 2 Colonial Bd., a CC.NN. Legion with 3 Battalions, minor units that amounted to the 28 Battalions of the sector with approximately 12,000 men and 30 batteries with 120 guns 65/17 and 77/28.

Briggs Force further north, in the meantime had managed to overcome the Italian resistance to the Cub Cub pass but was stopped at the next pass of Mescelit. In the northern part of the front of Cheren was completing with a deployment in a semicircle circumventions of Italian positions.

Air attacks with bombs and machine guns were continuous, insistent and nerve-wracking, because the enemy aircraft undisturbed raged on all positions, the redoubt, the batteries, trucks and baggage.[163]

The Viceroy of Ethiopia visiting the wounded cleared from the front of Cheren. The resistance in Eritrea. It represented the strongest obstacle encountered by the British offensive against the E.A.

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A SAAF Hartbest shot down by Italian fighter in Somalia The lack of shelters and suitable flight material in sufficient numbers to fill the gaps were the negative causes of the war in Somalia.

More often than men reacted angrily to shooting the sky with portable arms to compensate for the absence of real anti-aircraft batteries.

The tactical support to the Anglo-Indian troops engaged in Cheren was provided by the "Hartbest" of the 40th Sqdn. SAAF, an old obsolete 30s biplane, armed with two machine guns and speed on 260 km/h that operated safely because it had next to the latest "Hurricane" of 1 SAAF while the bomber component was represented by Ju.86 the 12th Sqdn. SAAF. The Italian air force countered the RAF presence with Ca.133 the residues of the 26th Group BT supported only by 3 CR.42 of the 411th Sqd. (Capt. V. Lucertini) and 2 Ro.37 Bis.

For the attack from Kenya's to support two African infantry divisions -11th and 12th - it was instead provided by 41st Sqdn. SAAF also equipped with Hawker "Hartbest" that operated until the border with the Italian Somalia in view of the final attack.

In the north alongside the 40th Sqdn. also the 1st SAAF Sqdn. with Hurricane and two sections of the 47th Sqdn. with Wellesley bombers and 223rd Squadron fully equipped with the same type of aircraft. Altogether a hundred machines.

Particularly intense in this period the work of incitement and sabotage conducted by the British, which was intensified action to coincide with the arrival in England from the Sudan of the Negus Ailè Selassie, whose presence had to act as a fulcrum catalyst for all Ethiopians, entice them to rebel Italians and facilitate British offensive implementing sabotage, attacks on convoys, ambushes of isolated vehicles, encirclement of small garrisons in the western defenses and scattered on the immense territory which was to begin the great rebellion.

In addition to the Sandford mission operating in Goggiam with the task of recruiting men for Negussita army and preparing the ground for the return of the Emperor, using as a basic unit of a battalion of the Sudan Defence Force, the HQ Cairo's authorized the establishment of a special unit called "Gideon Force" under the command of Lt. Col. Wingate, who was to accompany and protect the Negus in his return to Ethiopia and be with the help of British officers and NCOs, the first units of the new Ethiopian army. As Ailè Selassiè's seat of command was chosen Mount Bolaya and with a gigantic piece of propaganda made of millions of leaflets launched throughout Ethiopia and proficient verbal propaganda implemented with local rebel leaders, it was possible to converge towards Goggiam thousands of men eager to join the Emperor.[164]

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Very effective propaganda was made with the planes by the British, who threw from the sky thousands of leaflets with the effigy of the Negus inviting the Ascari to desert promising them forgiveness, money, food and protection for families. Many colonial soldiers were not insensitive to such psychological warfare and deserted.

No lack of sensational cases of collective desertion including that of Ras Sioum, appointed by the head AOI government responsible for the Tigray and as such paid, equipped and armed by Italy with all his 6,000 men, who slyly sniffing the new course of events, sided with the Negus attacking the Italians. A political error of assessment that Italy would paid for dearly.

The tenacious defense to Cheren who at first had given hope for stopping the offensive pushing the opponent and decided our counterattack, had generated respect in AOI Aviation Command to collect a small - comparable in size of with a Stormo of bomber and a fighter squadron - to be used at the right time to support the ground attack and cause surprise in English commands convinced now of the Italian aviation ultimate demise.

In anticipation of that surprise it was started the preparation near Asmara of a secret airfield with admissions for CR.42 aircraft intended to intercept the bombers in the sky of the city that the RAF now sent without escort.

The anticipation of the offensive mission was not fulfilled, since only 5 bombers among those assigned were able to join the action with the escort of 12 CR.42, and on March 15 the action was actually performed with surprise attacks on English troops front of Cheren and an offensive field mission of Agordat where they were destroyed on the ground 8 enemy aircraft. It was the swan song of the Italian Empire aviation, since the small air force was exhausted within ten days for enemy aircraft accidents and injuries and that exhaustion brought about the almost total disappearance at the end of March, of the I.E.A. Air Force that ceased to exist as an organic entity incorporated in regular and organic flight units.

The last act of the Cheren battle was fought from March 15 to 27 of the same month and was organized and set in motion by the British with an exceptional use of personnel and resources which could in the end to be right in the value of the men responsible for defense the locations and wear out all will to physical and moral resistance.

The new and definitive attack began with artillery, which took an average of a grenade fired shots higher than 1/3 those of the offensive the previous year (10,000 shells per hour) and with about 700 shells fired daily by each 88/27 gun.

The aviation use was intense, constant and decisive to confirm if it were still necessary such validation, the importance of the key domain of air of time of each military situation. Despite such supremacy in the heavens and on earth, the attacks were repeatedly repelled, and the Indians suffered a series of crushing defeats by grenadiers, riflemen, Alpine, CC.NN. Ascari and admirably supported by the old mountain guns they had found between Sanchil and Dologorodoc their ideal employment land and the most suitable military use.

The loss of Mount Dologorodoc due to the English violent artillery fire and repeated waves of attackers stopped the British on exposed peaks and it was necessary for the RAF/SAAF feed more isolated soldiers with air drops of food, water and medicines even if no always a parachute with supplies the added positions occupied by Indian and British.

On the morning of March 17, a lone CR.42 attacked some Wellesleys that were bombing the Dologorodoc area, after having identified and sighted the positions of the English infantry that signaled its presence with small luminous mirrors from the planes. A Hurricane also intervened in the fight and after a long and bitter duel got the better of the Italian fighter that crashed in flames. The pilot parachuted into the Bogu valley but landed during a fight and was killed.

Thousands of vehicles carrying daily materials and supplies for the 2 enemy divisions now reinforced with other complements and the elements of the dissolved "Gazelle Force", which had allowed the enemy command to achieve the required staff for each division of 15,000 men.[165]

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A CR42 of the E.A. Air Force - the Fiat biplane was considered the most modern and efficient of Italian fighter in Ethiopia was strengthened with 51 specimens come from Italy via the air. (A. Vigna collection)

The winning of air supremacy by the RAF reached in February had resulted the logistical preparations for the final offensive without the R.A. disturbing the movement of vehicles or destroy the Kassala-Cheren train intensively used by the British since there was only one air attack on Kassala between 10 February and the end of March.

The February 18, 1941 S.A.R. the Duke of Aosta Viceroy of Ethiopia received the telegram no. 43222/Gabaereo transmitted by the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces:

"I bring news that the decree being signed you are promoted General of Air Army. Amply deserved promotion. "

Mussolini

Amedeo di Savoy in order to advise via Gen. Pinna the aviators of Empire his promotion, sent the following message:

"While I will talk with proud satisfaction, I want you and all your employees know what I attribute honor conferred at their passionate, devoted, lavished desired collaboration by all, from the highest to the humblest, with wisdom, with perseverance, with faith with a spirit of sacrifice, with total dedication to duty, with value often heroic. To all my affectionate gratitude & my vibrant, comradely greetings, with certainty of the final victory."

Amedeo di Savoia

Even Gen. Pinna added some significant words to the message of the Viceroys and interpreting the feelings of all the Empire pilots saluted the promotion of the Duke of Aosta - aviator among aviators - with a triple hurrah.

On 19 Feb. 1941 Gen. Pinna with order of the day no. 3 issued by P.M. 1001, sent to the aviation units the following solemn commendation:[166]

They remove from the airfields of Somalia saving what can be saved from enemies bombing Airmen working to load a Air Force Fiat 634 of the south theater.

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«Solemn praise to the air units of the northern and southern aeronautical sectors for their admirable audacity in operating tirelessly day and night against overwhelming enemy air formations and in opposing them in action, continuing to valiantly defend the territories of the Empire and causing serious losses to the enemy».

The Commanding General of the Air Force
(Pietro Pinna)

On 13 February, the "Formidable" blocked at the entrance of Suez by German mines launched 14 "Albacore" against the port of Massawa divided between bombers and torpedo planes of the FAA, 2 of which were shot down by anti-aircraft defense.

The same day there was an air combat in Asmara between the Hurricanes of the SAAF Sqdn. and CR.32/42 of the 412th Sqd. CT two of which were shot down in the fighting. Lt. Luigi De Pol, wounded, was launched with a parachute on the way down but was strafed by a South African pilot and could not survive the severe injuries. The same fate suffered shortly later by Lt. Buzzi strafed hanging from the parachute and died in hospital after the amputation of a leg and an arm. Yet another episode of cowardice systematically pursued by the RAF.

Other aircraft clashes occurred in the following days with losses on both sides even if the progressive and irreversible decline of the R.A. military potential of Empire, changed the unstable balance recorded up to that point clearly in favor of British aviation. On February 16 was bombed the Caproni workshops of Gura and the SRAM of Asmara and Mai Edaga with further losses of planes being repaired or decentralized on the fields. There were some isolated interception of Blenheims by CR.42 and two were shot down by fighters. In 30 days of fighting they had been lost 53 Italians aircraft and another 23 had been damaged. Between 19 and 23 February were burnt 17 between Ca.133, SM.79, CR.32 and CR.42 and another 10 were damaged. Among the aircraft also lost a SM.82 arrived from Italy and surprised by the RAF in Aden on the Zula airfield.[167]

The impressive complex of Caproni aircraft manufacturer Gura (Eritrea) The airport once conquered by the British, was intensively used for the assembly of aircraft from Takoradi.

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On 1 March 1941, the strength of Empire R.A. was reduced to 42 airplanes of the 1st line and ten logistics support multi-engine.

In mid-March, the Cheren garrison divided into the strongholds of Beganà, Faleston, Dologorodoc / Sanchil, Forked Mountain / Mount Amba, Monte Breit / Monte Dolbac and North sector in front of the Mescelit pass, included 25 Battalions including 6 national, 10 groups of 65/17, 77/28, 105/28, 75/27 with two batteries 20/65 A/A and 47/32 antitank, a cavalry squadron group.

From the British side were arrayed reconstituted 4th and 5th Anglo-Indian Divisions assigned respectively to the sector Monte Sanchil, Dongolaas narrows, while to the north the Briggs Force acting with clear diversion intent and with the task of attracting Italian forces to the fullest extent.

The RAF was charged this time to carry out terrorist actions originate psychological effects among the peoples of Eritrea and particularly in Asmara, it included as a priority among the targets to hit. On March 15, the British offensive began with the use of 240 guns firing 30,000 shells in a single day and the same day the RAF bombed Asmara causing numerous victims among the civilian population and considerable scaremongering in commands. The attack also proceeded on the 16th with strong deployment of aviation, suppressing Italian counterattacks and slowly with the surrender of the resistance in certain areas of the advancing British albeit with major difficulties for the resistance that forced the RAF to supply by air-drops advanced units and who remained isolated. On March 19, fighting over Cheren 8 Italian fighter who attacked the British bombers effectively with three attacking one of which was on fire passed Mount Somanna with difficulty. Then they intervened, the Hurricane and this time were the Italian pilots to defend themselves from attacks of fast vehement enemy fighters.

Specialists working on a three-engine SM 81 masked with shrubs. Heavy losses were suffered by the E.A. Air Force following air strikes on Ethiopian airports.

A/A Cannon of the Royal Army in position in E.A. Few, outdated guns were designed to protect the E.A. from air attacks of the RAF.

In March 1941, the SAS had provisions by GS/RA to replace their planes with the airlines operated by the Ala Littoria in I.E.A., absorbing cargo of personnel, equipment and facilities including workshops Ala Littoria repairs of Addis Ababa and Piaggio/DMAD of Toselli. In the budget 1941 it was established by I.E.A. Government a budget of 24,500,000 lire, as a contribution assigned to the Air Ministry for the exercise of I.E.A. airlines under the heading: "Services of Civil Aircraft of AOI"[168]

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In 1940 the allocations of funds of the Ministry of the Air Force for I.E.A. aviation amounted to 225 million Lire which were to add another 50 million for extraordinary expenses.

At the same time and for the period 30 June 1940/30 June 1941 the Ministry of Finance assigned to the item "Costs of war for the R.A. in the I.E.A. "the sum of 966 million lire.

The momentary crisis that were going through the British in the attack on Cheren, convinced Gen. Carnimeo to attempt a vigorous counter-attack towards the top of Dologorodoc but the intervention of the artillery and air force before then blocked and shattered any remaining offensive momentum. March 17 Supercomando AOI through the Viceroy Amedeo d'Aosta telegraphed to Rome: "Our situation in terms of aviation today, that all the British effort is concentrated on us, see the online presence of the bombing equipment reduced to 3 SM.79, 3 SM.81 and 9 Ca.133. Excluding Ca.133 that can only be used in operations in the interior and SM.81 allocated one per theater, I must support the battle of Keren with three SM.79, where the adversary employs dozens of aircraft and bombs in continuation of our lines. The native troops are afraid only of the aerial bombardment and, in the face of heavy losses, become demoralized and disband. Yesterday the 105th and 112th battalions, which had enthusiastically launched a counterattack, were almost destroyed by the air force and rendered unusable. In the face of what we can do nothing. If you want, you still have time to help us by posting, not one aircraft at a time, but dozens of aircraft. From 2 February to date we have received one - I said one - SM.79, while in Italy we sent crews to withdraw 12. If you do not want to run a serious risk of compromising the Battle of Cheren send aircraft at any cost." On the afternoon of the 17th the Indians resumed the attacks towards the pass of Dongolaas while to the north the Briggs Force began to turn to the offensive Melescit pass. Then the battle subsided. From March 18 to 25 the offensive was entrusted almost exclusively to the RAF with repeated bombing and strafing not granted to any truce to tired colonial and national battalions that were in extremis reinforced by another 4 arrived from Gondar and Asmara.[169]

E.A. Infantry Troops transferred by air with a twin-engine Ca 148 of the Transport Aircraft Service. Precious services rendered by Ca 133/148 and SM. 73 aircraft in the service of the empire.

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The final attack on the front of Cheren was supported from about a hundred planes between Wellesley, Blenheim, Gladiator, Hardy, Lysander and Hurricane to which they were opposed only 17 Italian aircraft: 12 CR.42, 3 SM.79, 2 Ca.133: all that was possible for the RA to find and that had concentrated at Dessie.

Dogfights were recorded in those days, and despite the enormous disparity of power Italians reacted whenever it was possible to take off in flight from the tightly guarded airfields and subjected to repeated attacks by bombers and fighters. Even a group of Blenheim bombers de Gaullist of aviation arrived in Sudan to participate in operations against the Italian East Africa.

On the 18th a successful Italian fighter attack on the airfield of Agordat followed by an attack on the same airport made by 2 SM.79 bombers, caused the destruction of four between Wellesley and Hurricane, and damage to another 4 aircraft. Another of SAAF was shot down in combat on Cheren in the late afternoon.

Other aircraft clashes occurred in the days between March 18 and 21 with the killing of two fighters of the SAAF and the loss of 3 CR.42.

Bombing and strafing were carried on the forward Italian troops around Cheren by Blenheim and Wellesley intercepted at times by CR.42 often forced to engage in combat with fast Hurricane called via radio by the bombers and in such unequal clashes the trickle of pilots and Italian aircraft continued inexorably until the consummation.

On March 27, the enemy air force exerted his utmost effort to help the Indian troops that after 60 long days of fierce fighting in the mountains and the valley below right, succeeded at the cost of heavy losses to occupy the places evacuated a few hours earlier by Italian soldiers.

Bombing and strafing by the SAAF were performed on the retreating columns to Asmara but also Italian planes attacked with bombs and portions of the Anglo-Indian troops and fighters shot down three aircraft of the escort including two multi-engine and a light scout.

On March 28 was celebrated on airfields of the I.E.A. the 18th anniversary of the establishment of the Regina Areonautica, with short and meaningful ceremonies considering the situation in Ethiopia.

Starting from March 29 the enemy air offensive was concentrated in Asmara and Massawa where were concentrating the remaining Italian forces in Eritrea.

On the 25th was resumed the offensive with more force in the night preceded by intense aerial bombardment with extensive use of flares.[170]

Specialists of the RA of the airport of Alomatà working in the bush to hide the continuous aerial surveillance of the enemy the few planes remained in service in the E.A. Air Force.

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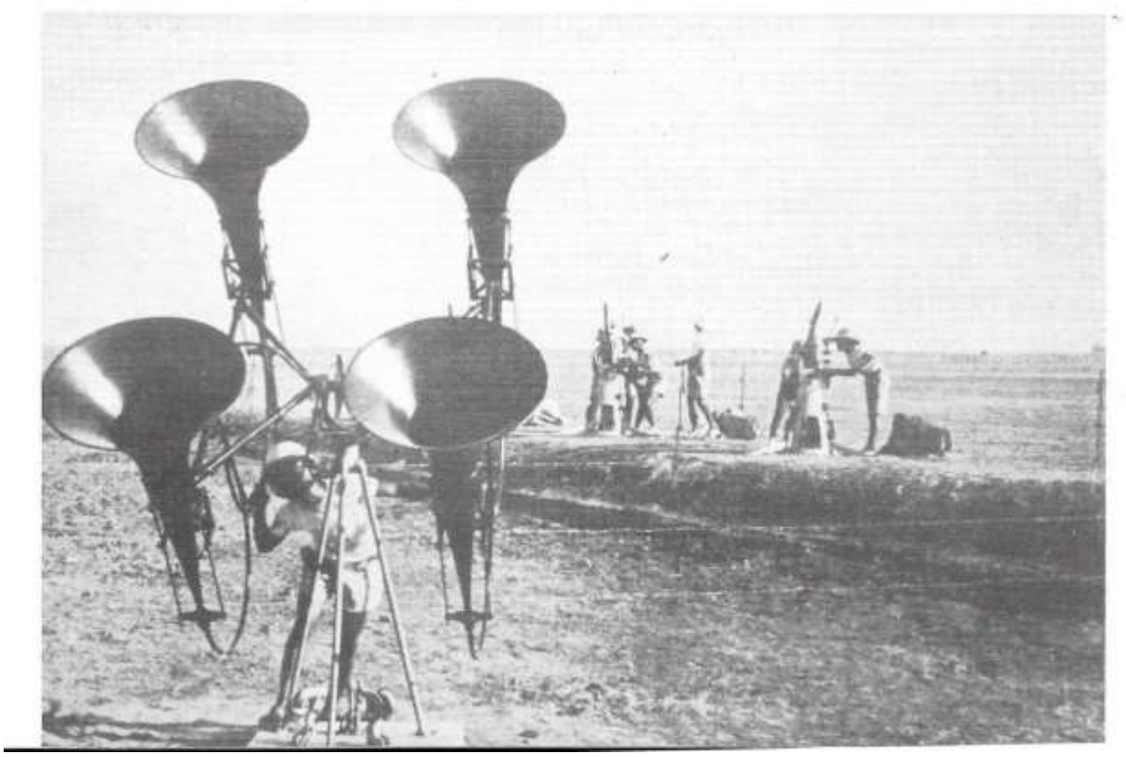
Bombing of the Gallabal airfield. They concurred in E.A operations of war the RAF, the SAAF and at the end of the campaign De Gaullist aviation squadrons.

From dawn to dusk the English artillery fired continuously on all the positions occupied and the only counter-attack carried out by CC.NN. and Ascari was unsuccessful while in the plain of Cheren the "I" tanks now several days waiting was cleared and made passable the Dongolaas Pass, they began to move to the Italian positions in the certainty that no one could hinder them in their march. The RAF bombed Falesth and Zeban.

On the evening of the 26th Gen. Frusci ordered to vacate Cheren and fall back to Ad Teclesan trying to save from certain encirclement principal sectors threatened with the advance of the armored vehicles.

Only 3000 were prisoners in Cheren, over 8,000 dead, 12,550 wounded. The defense had lasted 57 days and a garrison of 35,000 men with 80 old guns had stalled for two months 50,000 Anglo-Indians with more than 230 guns and 60 modern tanks backed by a powerful air force. The losses in dead and wounded had exceeded the 60% of the force used.[171]

Sagnac type air phones of the Navy installed to defend the naval base of Massawa The anti-aircraft defense of the RM in E.A. destroyed during the course of the war the highest number of enemy aircraft.



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In the period January 17 to March 17 aviation losses were 53 dead, 68 wounded, 27 missing and since the conflict had registered 296 dead and missing -a percentage equal to 20% of the personnel in charge of the I. E.A. flight units.

To ensure air links with the I.E.A. the GS/RA arranged to assist the flow of Kufra and Auenat a gas quantity for SAS comprises 63,000 kg. of fuel, 44,500 kg. ethylated gasoline, 13,250 kg. castor oil, 2,200 kg. RA mineral oil. Another 13,700 kg. of fuel that had been set aside at Gialo to make up for additional service needs.

Navigational assistance was assured by the beacon-finding apparatus of Benghazi (Z service) and RG Gialo and of course from that of Kufra.

A quantity of 22,200 liters of gasoline at 87 NO (Octane) was supplied to a Lufthansa FW.200 was to bring Gedda Minister Plenipotentiary of the Reich on Route Bir Dufan-Wadi Tamet-Gura - Jeddah and back via Asmara-Rhodes.

In the period 10 June 1940/28 February 1941 the Piaggio workshops of Addis Ababa preformed 147 engines repairs in the amount of L 8,300,000 as well as supplies of spare parts for £. 4,237,288.

At the same time the Caproni-AOI workshops performed the work of aircraft repairs and various services for a total of £. 22,368,000

THE ATTACK ON SOMALIA

The first signs of incipient attack enemy in the theater - zone south of Juba, - were manifested on January 20, 1941 with the crossing of the border by British motorized columns in three places south of the Wajir-Afrnadù – Kismayo highway.

The forces placed in the theater for defense included 3 Colonial Brigade with 14 Battalions at Dubats, some coastal Battalions, autonomous border groupings, 1 CC.NN Battalion, 1 sappers Battalion, 27 batteries of R.E., MVSN and R.M. artillery including 4 - 76/40 A/A batteries from the Navy and the MVSN reinforced by a 75/27 A/A battery, with material adapted to anti-aircraft fire.

There were still 1 CC.RR. Battalion, 2 G.d.F Cos. and various units of minor importance.

In January 1941 these units were grouped into two colonial divisions: 101st (Gen. Carnevali) located by Brava to Dolo and 102nd (Gen. Santini) from Kismayo to Brava. A grouping Dubat was in reserve at Din-sor. The command of the theater was given in about a month to Gen. Carlo De Simone -with command headquarters in Mogadishu, which was replaced in December, the former commander of the theater dismissed by the Viceroy for manifest professional incompetence and defeatism, thereby overcoming a serious moral and operational crisis in the area.

The Navy possessed in Somalia 2 batteries 120/45 located in Kismayo (island of Serpenti Island and of Pescicani) and 2 batteries 76/40 reinforced by a Breda 13.2 mm. A/A machine gun. Another battery 120/45 with a 76/40 A/A was to defend Mogadishu entrusted to the staff of Milmart - two anti-ship batteries with guns 120/45 were at Dante and Burgao. In the port of Kismayo they were anchored 17 merchant ships (11 Italian, 5 German, 1 Yugoslav) and had been armed with the German Flag and personnel the tug "Kionga". The Navy/Somalia was under the command of Commander Fucci, who later replaced by Commander Montanarella.

The Regia Aeronautica had poor air forces in Somalia with 2 Sqd. bombers with Ca.133 and some fighters CR.32/C.42 based in Mogadishu and Gobuen. The R.A. (Command Air Force Sector, south) was under the responsibility of Gen. Sabatini with operating headquarters in Mogadishu. English opposing forces completely motorized and armored units were represented by two South African infantry divisions: 11th (Gen. Godwin-Austen) and 12th (Gen. Wetherall) with 7 Regts. Rhodesia, Nigeria and the Gold Coast, 8 Battalion South African/Rhodesia, 6 of field artillery groups, 4 batteries anti-aircraft and antitank, the sappers units, transport, broadcasting, health care, and also a armored car Rtg. reinforced with two armored squadrons and a infantry tank co. type I 'Mathilda'. A total of 20,000 men, 4,000 vehicles and Bren Carriers, 200 guns, 50 armored vehicles, 24 “I” tanks.

Commander in Chief of the theater Gen. A. Cunningham.

The RAF Kenya included 7 Squadrons between -bombers and fighters, a squadron of aero-cooperation (Sqdns. 1st RAF, 2nd, 3rd, 11th, 12th, 40th, 41st of the SAAF located between Nanyuki, Eastleigh, Mombasa, Archer's Post, Ndege's Nest, Marsabit, Loki taung, Garissa, Lamu, Nairobi, Bura, Dar es Salaam). A total of 160 aircraft including bombers, fighters, reconnaissance aircraft.[172]

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The operating instructions given by the Supercomando AOI predicted not to tense up in defense of the indefensible borders of the rest with its 600 km long, but gradually give way to a possible pressure until Juba and resist to the bitter end on the river including in the defense also of Kismayo. One brigade had been assigned as a reserve and the only reinforcements airplanes that could possibly be assigned to the sector were influenced by the arrival of aircraft from Italy.

The preparation of the offensive against Somalia was facilitated by photographic reconnaissance on Italian air bases made from twin-engine "Maryland" the SAAF that they controlled more shots on the situation of the airfields of Kismayo, Gobuen, Afmadow, Bardera and Gelib but where were spotted just a few bombing aircraft a few days before the English were hit by bursts of Hurricane fighters of the 2nd Sqdn. SAAF and severely damaged. Two Hurricane were shot down by CR.42 of the 413th Sqd CT under Command of Lt. De Micheli and the gregarious 2nd Lt. Bartolotti and Serg. Strano. An excellent result obtained by CR.42 against the fastest and well-armed British fighters.

The British plan called for an attack on three directions of Afmadow-Gobuen-Bulo, Erillo and Gelib entrusted the 11th Inf. Div. while the 12th was to aim directly on Kismayo.

After the first exploratory approaches the forces attack began on February 4 with artillery preparation and aerial bombardment of Gelib, Afmadow, Kismayo and Lower Juba defenses, which facilitated the penetration of the mobile forces - motorized columns and squadrons of armored cars - that quickly they swept in more directions.

After some attempts to resist the in place the border customs units had to withdraw - under the enemy pressure and the English technological supremacy, manifested in weapons, armor, vehicles, aviation. The threat of encirclement was the most worrying aspect that intimidated defenders sometimes advancing tens of kilometers by the South African fast armored cars.

On 10 February, the situation was already alarming to the point that the Viceroy saw fit to reach in flight Mogadishu to examine the situation and give more disposed provisions to hold out as long as possible on the Juba line.

On the southern front, the SAAF attacked several times the airfields of Gobuen, Vittorio Africa, Merca, Javello and Lugh Ferrandi, torching 3 Ca.133 on the ground and losing two Italian fighter planes to attack.

The tactical aviation support had supported with Hartbest the advance of British troops in Somalia and those units were then attacked by a few Caproni bombers.

They were available as already mentioned the Sqdns. 2nd, 33rd, 11th, 12th and 40th of the SAAF equipped with Hurricane, Battle, Hartbest supported by the old 2nd line aircraft but still useful as Audax, Wapiti, Valentia, Auster, De Havilland Dragon Rapid, Lysander, Ju.52 the SAA, DH86, Ju.86, Gauntlet that roamed unpunished in the sky.

They were lost in the first attack some Hawker aircraft hit by automatic weapons fire of land units and attacked by the CR.42s of the 412th Sqd. CT.

Between 10 and 15 February were again attached the airports in Somalia with the destruction of another 12 aircraft between Ca.133, SM.81, and CR.32 burned on the ground or hit by anti-aircraft fire or otherwise lost after suffering damage serious.

Even the FAA was present in I.E.A. operating area with embarked Swordfish and Albacore squadrons 826th, 829th and 803rd with Fulmar fighters, all of these planes who participated in bombing and strafing of Mogadishu, Kismayo and the three villages of Somalia.

Then the CV. “Formidable” who transported them moved directly to the Red Sea to Suez. Others attacks were occasionally made by "Swordfish" of the CVL "Hermes" transiting the Indian Ocean directed to Suez.

The aircraft carrier was escorted by the CA "Shropshire", however, was bombarded by SM.81 that placed some bombs near the cruiser.

The destruction of the slow and helpless Ca.133 affected and systematically set on fire on defenseless air bases in Somalia and the modest performance of the SM.81 reduced to a few examples, convinced the GS of the IEA Air Force to send to Somalia a Sqd. of faster and more efficient SM.79. The abandonment of Kismayo and Mogadishu virtually marked the abandonment of the Italian Somalia and the disappearance of the southern aviation sector.[173]

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On only the airport in Mogadishu were found 21 aircraft of all types destroyed when the enemy took possession of the airfield. The advance towards Kismayo had the tactical support of "Maryland" and "Anson" the 60th Sqdn. and twin-engine Ju.86 of 12th Sqdn. which they bombed targets in Kismayo, Mogadishu and Neghelli trying among other things to destroy some Ca.133 in a satellite emergency airfield a few kilometers from Merca.

The tactic used by General Cunningham in Somalia differed from that employed by Platt in Eritrea, as prudently avoided confrontations with larger forces, attacked with artillery and aviation isolated garrisons and making them fall one after the other with ease. To start from February 20 began the desertions in mass the Dubat and Askari and colonial forces dissolved in a short time.

Minor aerial activity in Somalia by Italian aviation where few Ca.133 bombers supported by some CR.32/CR.42 and Ro.37 Bis did what was humanly possible to do in an irreversible and difficult situation.

Bombing and strafing were performed on Gerillo, Digh Merer, Diff, Colbio. They were lost three bombers, a fighter and a reconnaissance plane and five others were damaged. The SAAF Squadrons with 40th, 11th, 41st, 2nd and 60th with Hartbest, Hardy, Anson, Gauntlet, Lysander, Battle attacked again the airports Javello, Shashamane, Gobuen with the loss of three aircraft and damage to another two.

The rapid advance beyond the Juba allowed the SAAF the rapid construction of three runways to provide motorized troops, more rapid support and prevent the forward movement of supplies and equipment located in Kenya to hundreds of kilometers away.

Between January 31 and February 2 the Hartbest of the 40th SAAF were particularly engaged in the machine-gun the Italian troops retreating toward Kismayo.

Air support was also intensified by Hurricanes of the 3rd Sqdn, who had gone to join the Hartbest biplanes on new prepared landing fields in Liboi, Aligaba and Galma Galla.

The 11th was ordered the evacuation of Kismayo and the steamers in port followed different paths: internment, scuttling, sunk by the enemy or captured. The 13th the RAF attacked in force with bombs, strafing, machine gunning the Mansur cornerstone shattering resistance and the 14th the first British vanguards were beyond the Gobuen and Kismayo that was occupied the same day. Juba was not kept and had been passed in several places without difficulty.

The 16th the aviation in the south theater was reduced to 3 Ca.133, 1 CR.32 and 1 CR.42 and the RAF undisturbed attacked Mogadishu in more locations, causing hundreds of casualties among the civilian population.

The only significant resistance was made by the garrison of Gelib that, subjected for several days to heavy attacks with infantry backed by artillery and aviation, was captured on 22 February.

The successive enemy aerial attacks to the conquest of Somalia, Cheren, Asmara and Massawa, were brought against Harar, Dire Dawa, Addis Ababa. A Blenheim was shot down near Dire Dawa by Capt. Corrado Ricci commanding the 410th Sqd. CT.

The few remaining bombers of southern sector aviation were employed in isolated missions against rebel columns in Gojam, in Kebri dahar Gorrahei near and south of Harrar.

On March 13 was shot down in combat along with his wingman Capt. Palmera commanding the 110th Sqd RT who had replaced Lt. Zanelli, and knocked down a Hurricane just before. The young and brave captain saved himself by jumping with a parachute and was captured by the British.

The air war shifted slowly from the south and from west to Ethiopia's heart and dogfights occurred between Harar and Dire Dawa defended by the 410th Sqdn. CT with CR.32 and some CR.42, who had to courageously face with technical and military inferiority the Hurricanes of the SAAF. Even a few Ro.37 Bis of the 110th Sqd. they tried to do their best to protect the two cities from the frequent incursions from the south and from Aden.

Even opponents suffered losses in combat and for the anti-aircraft fire and a Hurricane was shot down by machine gun operated by a specialist of the 410th Sqd. CT.

An episode similar to what happened to Capt. Raffi saved by Visintini occurred on March 15 by the enemy after a Hurricane of the 3rd Sqdn SAAF, hit and damaged in combat, landed on the satellite field of Dire Dawa K.92 and pilot was rescued by another component the squadron landed soon after loaded him on board and managed to take off under the rifle fire. [174]

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The captured Hawker Hurricane was found in good condition, and was transferred to Dagabur by land.

There were other enemy bomber raids and 5 Italian planes were destroyed in Dire Dawa and other 8 damaged.

The situation in the area deteriorated further when the British landed in Somaliland retaking it quickly.

The rapid enemy advance with fully motorized and armored divisions against which the colonial battalions could do nothing and national ones better suited to a modern war, it was facilitated by the continued presence and forces of the enemy air force, which despite not particularly modern aircraft, with the exception of Hurricane squadrons, enjoyed all the rights that are required to battle with the aviation intervention: continual presence, supplies of fuel, ammunition and explosive, replacement materials for aircraft maintenance, rest periods for personnel, security of being able to dominate the sky without the fear of the modest threat of flak reaction.

Never as in Ethiopia, the RAF was able to exert its military activities with the certainty of not being countered nor put in danger.

So it was very easy for opponents aviators, support with advanced tactical actions of motorized columns, eliminating ground any danger or reaction that could influence the penetration in the territories of the beyond Juba to Kismayo, Mogadishu and then turns to the north-east.

Amedeo di Savoia-Aosta was aware of that situation, feared what would happen with the north and south connections and asked insistently to Rome for new airplanes to face the situation. On March 18, with a dispatch no. 7361/DP Mussolini respond to the Viceroy stating that he was doing everything possible to help the Empire aviation even though they presented serious difficulties due to the loss of the stopovers of Kufra and Auenat, the need to mobilize additional tanks for SM.79, the failure of the Brindisi-Rhodes-Asmara route that had caused the loss at Maritza of two SM.79 complete with the crews. "... Make sure we do what we can do to help." Mussolini. On the same day it was decided to send to I.E.A. another 6 SM.79 and 30 CR.42 together with 6 engines waiting in Libya.

Even the Chief of Staff/RA Gen. Pricolo, was associated with the project of Stamage to intensify the shipment of air supplies, prospecting sending a Cant. 1007 Bis with additional tanks, that this proposal was not accepted by the Empire Aviation Command concerned about the relevant training on the new aircraft which Ethiopia crews had to undergo the and suggested as an alternative sending the tri-motor SM.84 and the fighter Re .2000 even in small numbers.

The loss of Asmara advised, however, to suspend all departing aircraft for I.E.A. and had to re-study the situation again with new routes and itineraries, new airfields, support systems, technical and flight difficulties existing in select areas with fields of Sifani, Alomatà, Dessie. But on April 27 a radiogram of Gen. Pinna at the GS/RA communicated to suspend departure of reinforcement aircraft for I.E.A.

With such a dramatic decision any further attempt or plan to send more aircraft to I.E.A. faded, although the persistence of wrecked attempts to technical failure of the aircraft designated to I.E.A. to achieve the 4000 km crossing.

On March 15, British troops landed at Berbera in Somaliland and with a force of 10 Battalions, 400 vehicles and light tanks, 10 field batteries were placed in the march towards Harrar and English units from the Italian Somalia broke up resistance at Marda pass and penetrated into Harrarino thanks to the dissolution of some Dubat battalions. It was necessary to clear the area and deploy troop in protection of Addis Ababa while on the same day of March 27 was evacuated Harrar and forewarned the complete abandonment of the sector with the withdrawal of the garrison of Dire Dawa.

There had been an effective resistance to the outside of some significant episodes of value made by national and indigenous survivors of the Colonial Battalion and the situation worsened very quickly.[175]

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With the abandonment of the Addis Ababa airport an enemy soldier looks intrigued a CR 32 the 410th Sqd. CT (Cap. C. Ricci) found damaged on the airfield. (IWM)

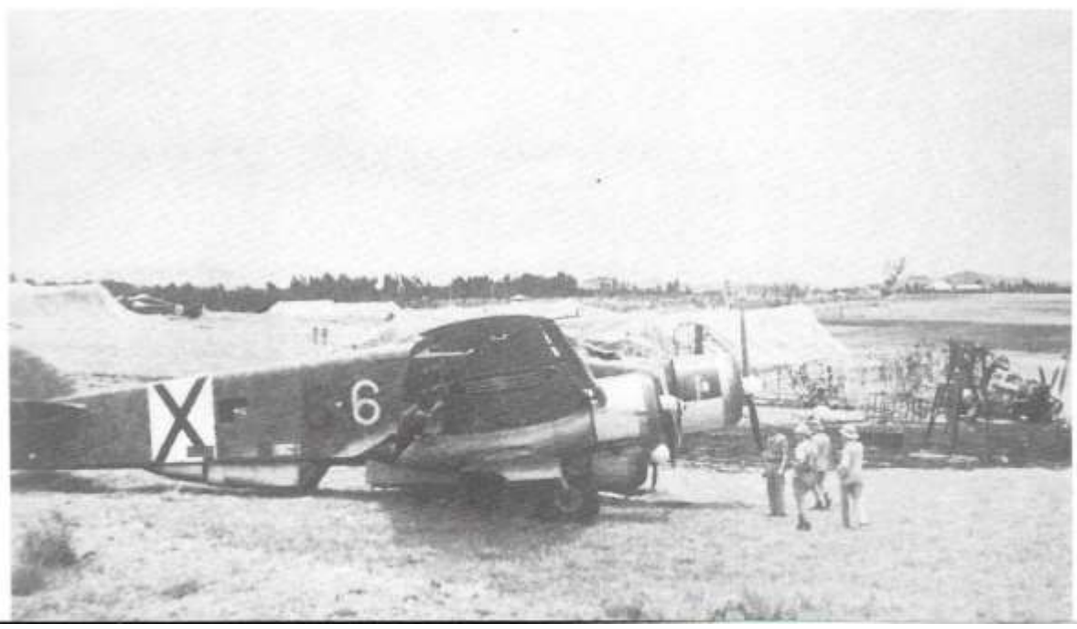
The enemy pressure on Harrarino supported by South African aviation and the RAF which was installed in Somaliland's airfields is preformed particularly against the defenses of the Marda Pass blocking the road to Harar and Dire Dawa, defenses that were bombed several times by four squadrons of bombers Blenheim, Battle, Ju.86.

Some SM.79 and CR.32 attacked and machine gunned African units in march in the area and in anticipation to prevent other such attacks, the British command moved to Giggica a section of 4 Hurricanes of the SAAF. Despite the presence of hazardous British fighters, the few CR.32 fighters of the 410th Sqd. CT, one of which had been rebuilt with material recovered from other biplanes out of action reinforced by a few CR.42 of the 413th Sqd. CT, they continued to attack motorized columns near Giggica and Marda Pass, regardless of the presence of Hurricane and also some bombers participated in isolated bombing missions on the Giggica and Gorrahei airports.

The occupation of Harrar took place on March 24 was opposed by some, Italian bombers and fighters that attacked an emergency runway prepared near Giggica, severely damaging five multi-engine transport of the SAAF including Ju.52, De Havilland Dragon Lockheed Vega.

The advance of the African units from the border of Kenya on the roadway Mega-Ascebo-Javello-Allata-Addis Ababa had no particular difficulties and the armored vanguards of the African 12th Inf. Div. supported by the "Hartbest" of the 40th SAAF, occupied the Javello airport finding in twenty aircraft destroyed on the ground in many of them Ca.133, other scrap, planes were found on the Neghelli field.[176]

A SM79 of the 44th BT Group (Maj N. Pasti) found abandoned and damaged with other aircraft on the airport in Addis Ababa. The majority of Italian aircraft was destroyed by ground attacks of the RAF and SAAF (IWM)



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On 29 March 7 between CR.42 and CR.32 of the 413th and 410th squadrons attacked in the early hours of the morning the Giggica airfield torching 7 aircraft and shooting down another, taking off, against the loss of a CR.42 whose pilot, 2nd Lt. Silvano, seriously injured had to jump by parachute.

The enemy advance towards Dire Dawa led to the evacuation of the city and the few planes remained on the airfield that was occupied by the riflemen of the 11th Inf. Div. of East Africa. On the airport grounds 18 planes were found destroyed including 2 SM.79 being repaired, burned in the hangar at the time of the evacuation of the airfield.

At the end of March had been dissolved all 12 Bomber groups of E.A. and the only one left was the efficient 44th of Addis Ababa with SM.79 (Maj. Nino Pasti).

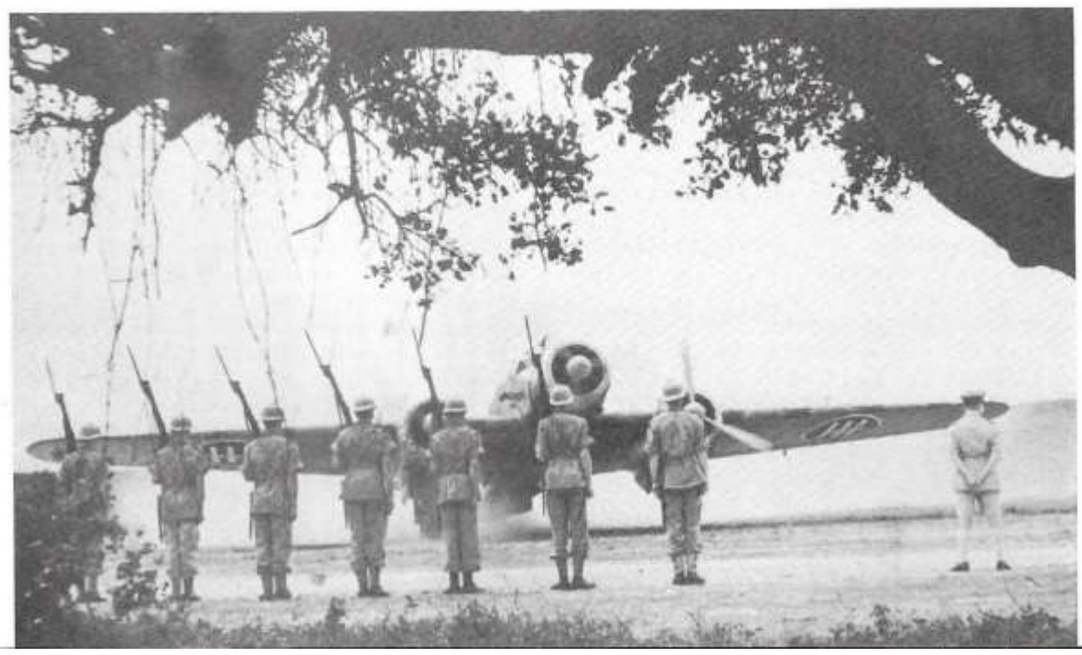
On advanced defensive line of Hauasc that was to defend the capital, were deployed residues units evacuated from Somaliland and from Harrarino and comprising: 504th CC.NN.Battalion, G.d.F. Co., Engineer artisan Battalion, Engineer of radio operators Co., "Bonamico" motorized Grouping, the remains of 4 colonial Battalions, 2nd Battalion of the 210th Cacciatori d'Africa Regiment, 1 Azzurro Battalion – all together 9,500 men with 108 cannons, and 500 vehicles under the command of Gen. Liberati while what was left of the units evacuated from Somalia -about 9,000 men between national and colonial - brought with Gen. De Simone into the region of Galla and Sidama under the orders of the commander of the west theater Gen. Gazzera.

Between the German personnel present in E.A., in addition to the sailors of the 14 merchant ships blocked between Massawa and Kismayo which were formed two riflemen truck companies (PM.1002), there were six volunteers for the aviation including pilot Sgt. Maestri Herich assigned to Gura, Sgt. Malewsky Hans and airmen Herth and Dypka assigned to the RA/E.A. command in Addis Ababa and specialists Ehn Walther and Weisshoper Wilhelm assigned to the 7th Sqd. BT and 44th BT Group.

Air strikes brought now against our airfields in the East zone caused further serious losses to the ground planes and were even more intensified after the occupation of the airports of Hargeisa and Javello places in the shortest distance from the Italian positions.

What was left of the west sector aviation - 4 Ca.133 and 4 between CR.32 and CR.42, intervened collectively the 23rd at dawn, in the Babile area, a short distance from the Marda Pass, hitting with some bomb the positions held by the British.[177]

Dire Dawa - Arriving in the personal airplane of the Viceroy, Gen. Mambrini instructed to agree on the status of "open city" to Addis Ababa. A English picket gives military honors (IWM).



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They were lost 2 CR.42 departing from emergency airfield of Bisidino and not returned.

On 27 March, the RAF carried out the greatest effort bombing several times with bombers and fighters the sectors of Dire Dawa, and Miesso Gota, the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway, the approach roads to the front.

The defense was now almost entirely entrusted now to the national units, since the natives of colonial brigades deserting in the tens of thousands with weapons, equipment, pack animals and wide gaps in the line suddenly opened, allowing the enemy to advance without difficulty, making workarounds in areas that were considered guarded and defended.

The surviving aircraft from Somalia and from Harrarino were decentralized among the airfields of Argoba, K.91 and K.92 of Dire Dawa, Afgooye, Ganam, Alomatà and improvised strips in the bush.

The 410th Sqd. CT abandoned the Dire Dawa airport after destroying inefficient aircraft remaining on the field, materials, ammunition, equipment, taking of Dessie and Tareina where they had decentralized even the few CR.42 the 413th Sqd. from Eritrea.

The 29th Dire Dawa was evacuated and March 30 a British airplane threw a message at Hausc addressed to the Viceroy for the particulars of surrender of the city of Addis Ababa -hour, location, mode, particular signs of the aircraft recognition, names of plenipotentiaries as required by E.A. Italian authorities.

The airports of Dessie, Gondar, Alomatà, Kombolcha and Assab among the most important remaining to Italian aviation, were systematically attacked with further destruction of aircraft.

With the remaining residual aircraft some offensive missions were made with SM.79 escorted by CR.42. They were also abandoned at the end of April the airports of Dessie, Hombolcha and Alomatà; on the airfields were found about fifty aircraft destroyed by earlier raids - strafing and flight incident, - bombing whose parts were pushed to the perimeters of the landing ground. At the same date had been lost another 10 aircraft and as many surviving aircraft were remained charge to the RA in E.A.
Despite the departure for Egypt of 7 Squadrons between Bombers and fighters of the RAF/SAAF Squadrons another 8 remained in Ethiopia for the support to ground units for a total of 120 aircraft between bombers, fighters, reconnaissance planes backed by thirty multi-engine transport.[178]

Final checks to a SM.79 before a war mission. After the loss of Eritrea, Somalia. Hararino and Shoa, the war in E.A moved to Galla and Sidama and Danakil where Italian units were still holding.

The Negus Ailè Selassie with Gen. Wingate commander of the "Gideon Force" formed to incite the Abyssinians against Italians. In May Ailè Selassie re-entered Ghebi in Addis Ababa.

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Airport of Dessie was the most important to the Air Force E.A. after the loss of bases in Asmara, Gura, Mogadishu, Dire Dawa, Addis Ababa, we notice the modernity of the facilities and the runway in macadam.

On March 31, the Supercomando AOI warned the commander of the east theater to transfer his troops to the Dessie-Amba Alagi area and to deal with the British surrender in Addis Ababa, whereas in the city lived about 35,000 - Italian civilians mostly women and children - which ran great dangers for feared Abyssinian reprisals.

The yield and city delivery to the British was to take place almost simultaneously with the abandonment of the Ethiopian capital by the Italian Armed Forces. These details and other details to be discussed in Dire Dawa by the Italian Envoy Plenipotentiary Gen. Mambrini commander P.A.I. Italian East Africa.

On April 2 was sabotaged the railway with Djibouti with the derailment of a train carrying fuel then ignited by strafing aircraft near bushel; on April 4 was intensively bombed the outskirts of Addis Ababa with more waves and airport suffered heavy damage in the destruction of hangars, warehouses, workshops, command posts, 2 SM.79 and 2 CR.42 were torched and other aircraft damaged. It was now clear that the terrorist and psychological offensive implemented by the enemy aimed at achieving the return of Italian troops.

Participated in the attack Battle, Blenheim, Maryland, and Ju.86 bombers escorted by Gladiator and Hurricane, which were attacked by CR.32/CR.42. This new enemy raid convinced the Viceroy to abandon the city making to declare "open city", and in this sense were taken of the final arrangements with the British authorities by sending plenipotentiaries aboard a SM.79 piloted by Capt. Michelangelo Serafini, former commander of the 63rd Sqd. of the 29th Gr. BT, which landed in Dire Dawa with aircraft equipped with special markings. On the evening of April 4 moved between Jimma, Dessie and Shashamane the surviving aircraft at the airfields in Addis Ababa -4 fighters CR.32, CR.42 and 3 SM.79.

The next day they were bombed and machine-gunned in the field of capital other already damaged aircraft and April 6th South African troops entered the capital of the Empire finding on the airport 24 scrap aircraft hulks left in the field and other damaged aircraft as a result of the bombing of the 4th. The fall of Addis Ababa, the conquest of Somalia and Eritrea with the destruction of most of the armed forces Italian and R.A. convinced Gen. Wavell to order the return of part of the British units stationed in Ethiopia including the 4th Anglo-Indian Inf. Div. as well as SAAF squadrons 94th, 1st, 14th, 203rd, 223rd, 47th and 2nd assigned to Egyptian bases for reconstitution with new pilots and more efficient flight material.[179]

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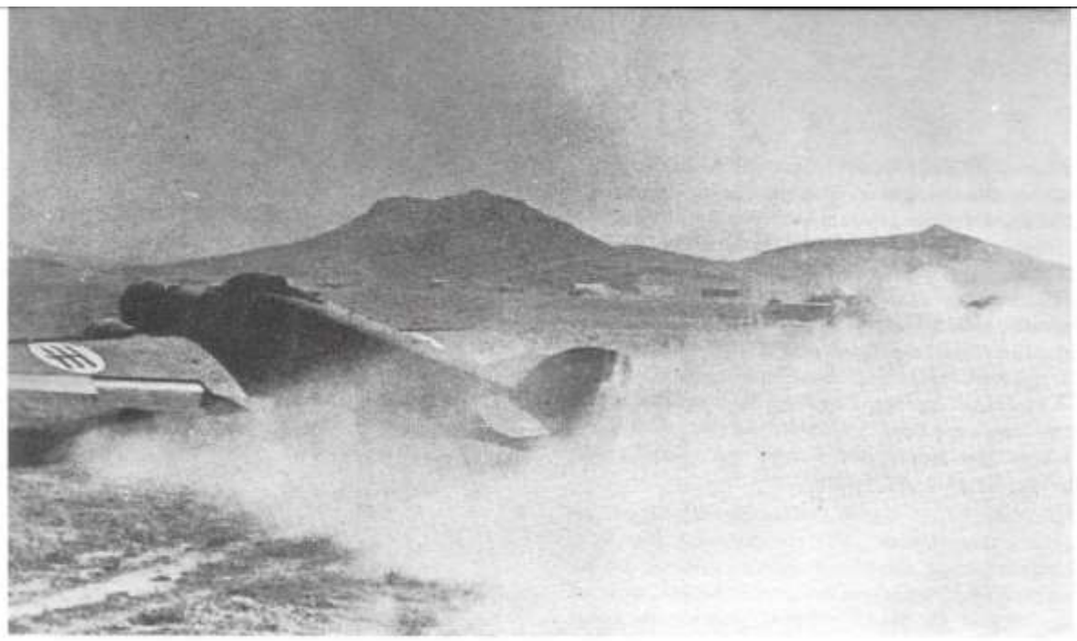

Takeoff of a SM.79 of the 44th Group BT from Dessie, In June 1941, the E.A. Aircraft in service numbered only a dozen planes between SM79, Ca.133, Ca.148, CR32 / 42 scattered on different airfields.

The abandonment of Addis Ababa, where they lived approximately 35,000 Italian civilians exposed to reprisals Abyssinian, was programmed so that the interval between the retreat of the rear guard and the entrance of the first enemy units, was minimized to reduce the potential risks of killings and violence against women and children.

* * *

The air war in March was manifested by the growing superiority of the enemy in number and quality of used aircraft, contrasted more and more faintly by what was left of the Empire aviation.

Strong inroads with numerous deaths and injuries, damage to plants and materials were recorded on Asmara, Dire Dawa, Harar and some important locations invested directly by military operations including Neghelli, Giggica, Harar, Dire Dawa were evicted.

Our few bombers and fighters performed bombing, strafing and machine gunning in some areas of the south, Gorrahei –Dagabur road, on the airport of Giggica and Agordat to the ground destroying 12 aircraft and shooting down 19 planes in combat and 3 from the anti-aircraft fire. Many losses in men and flight material due to enemy offense and forced abandonment in several major airports.

What remained of the garrisons of Harrarino and Somalia, passed through the harsh experience of war for 60 long days of battle, settled in defense in the Lake Margaret zone in the region of Galla and Sidama; these units included: the Azzurro "Somalia" Battalion, 2 Inf. Battalion, 1 CC.RR.Battalion, 1. CC.NN. Battalion, 4 Colonial Battalions, a motorized group, 29 batteries with 115 pieces, 500 vehicles, various services -health, subsistence, motor park, transmissions -for a total of 6,000 national and 3,000 colonial soldiers.

In late March the remnants of the 30 organic E.A. aviation squadrons of bombers, fighters and reconnaissance planes had been concentrated in only 80% of the field of Dessie: 21 Ca.133, 9 SM.79, 12 between CR.32 and CR.42, 2 Ro.37 Bis, a pair of multi-engine transport for not more than 50 airplanes including those decentralized to Alomatà.

On April 6, the field of Dessiè was attacked in several waves and fifteen aircraft were destroyed or burned and others were damaged more or less severely.

He was heartbroken that halved the organic material found in the flight. Several squadrons were finally dissolved!

In mid-April, the situation of R.A. in E.A. had become particularly difficult, not holding the required coordination, command, fragmented in its location:[180]

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An air strike of the SAAF on the ruined Jimma airport. After the abandonment of the west region remained on duty 1 Ca.133, 1 Ca.148, 1 CR32 and 2 CR42 who were to transfer these to Gondar

Gen. Pietro Pinna in Amba Alagi had followed the fate of the Duke of Aosta, Gen. Faronato Chief of Staff had moved to Jimma at command of the southwest theater of Gen. Gazzera, the tactical command Aeronautical E.A. had been moved to Mai Ceu, the commander of the southern sector, Gen. Sabatini, was in the region of the Galla and Sidama together surviving airmen of Somalia, Gen. Piacentini was at Dessie together with the northern sector airmen. The west theater command had ordered the abandonment of the advanced airfields, stores and aircraft manufacturer and decentralization of all the airmen of the south and west sectors to Aggarò at no great distance from Jimma.

As of April 15 the combat effectiveness of the residue E.A. equipment was represented by 6 bombers and as many fighters scattered on some fields between Galla and Sidama and Amara in addition to a dozen SM.79 and CR.42 concentrated as mass of maneuver on Alomatà secret airfield near Dessie in defense of the reduced Amba Alagi area but the British, found the field thanks to the efficient information service available to them in E.A, attacked it on the 18th of the same month by destroying all aircraft prepared for the action.

The abandonment of Eritrea with the important refit bases of Gura and Mai Edaga, the evacuation of Addis Ababa with the Piaggio workshops, SRAM Mogadishu, Asmara, Addis Ababa had resulted in the loss of about a hundred airplanes were in repair destroyed or sabotaged at the time of withdrawal.

In just over 60 days the E.A. Air Force had lost 50% of its potential.

The loss of Somalia and of Eritrea, meant the abandonment of the much aircraft equipment, equipment, weapons, ammunition, explosives, equipment.

In Somalia alone they were lost almost all MSA materials, 800 tons fuel and 840 tons bombs except what was saved in time by transferring the field of Gorrahei ammunition, aviation gasoline, MSA material. The only airport in Mogadishu were abandoned 1,550,000 liters of automotive gasoline and 360,000 liters of aviation gasoline as well as significant quantities of war materials and food for whose salvation were missing the required vehicles.

It was very important the latest speeds of the enemy if you think that the 2nd Inf. Div. which together with the 12th African had launched the attack on Somalia, walked 400 km in three days in Somali territory without encountering for the most part resistance.

The results of the offensive in Somalia Gen. Cunningham convinced that it was possible an attack in Ethiopia with forces from the south, and to that end he requested and obtained by Gen. Wavell a new motorized infantry units to continue the offensive in the certainty of succeeding in his goal.[181]

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The Fall of Eritrea

Having lost Cheren due to the physical exhaustion of its brave defenders, the situation in the northern theatre became extremely critical and the command action was based on the defence of the Asmara and Massawa sectors, each of which constituted an entity in itself.

The last barrier before Asmara was set at Ad Teclesan that with the mountain ranges around the town, were an excellent barrier to the now rampant mechanized forces inside Eritrea in grave danger.

The garrison of Ad Teclesan consisted of 3 colonial Battalion and 1 CC.NN. Battalion with 4 groups of artillery, these units then reinforced by the 10th Grenadiers of Savoy Regiment coming directly from Addis Ababa.

Already on March 29, it is the first signs of the enemy's attack with artillery fire and fighter and bomber attacks on vehicles in transit were had on the road from Asmara, which caused deaths, damage and destruction of vehicles. The main attack was launched on the 30th and was able to progress slowly to conquer the same day the position of Ad Teclesan that opened almost to the British conquest of Asmara, the capital of the old and faithful Eritrea without a fight not to cause casualties among the civilian population was evacuated on April 10 by the Italian Armed Forces and conquered the same day by the enemy.

The garrison of the city was sent partly to the Amba Alagi area, partly to the Gondar-Goggiam redoubt and partly to Dessiè to guarantee the defense of Addis Ababa from the north, now threatened also from this direction. The defense of Massawa would be carried out with the forces on site and with those recovered to the N.E. from the Asmara sector.

The bombing of Asmara were thwarted as much as possible with sporadic missions by the survivors of the SM.79 of the 44th BT Group under the command of Maj. Nino Pasti that from Dessie were operating both in terms of Dire Dawa Giggica-east, and on that of Cheren to the north. These bombers were attacking in the two sectors by Hurricanes and by the 3rd Sqdn. SAAF shot down on April 2 that a three-engine damaging another two but suffered the lose of a fighter by the defensive weapons of SM.79; a Blenheim bomber was also shot down on March 31 over Dessie by a CR.42 and a Gladiator fell to the anti-aircraft fire near Asmara.

On 1 April Asmara was considered "open city" with agreements reached with the British, and was evacuated by Italian commands and occupied by the Anglo-Indian troops of Gen. Platt.[182]

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The important port of Massawa in Eritrea still remained to be occupied, on which the efforts and resources of the English command were concentrated for the final attack. The «Swordfish» of the 813th and 824th Squadrons embarked on the CV «Eagle» stationed in Alexandria were also placed at the disposal of the RAF, which were transferred to Port Sudan to attack the Italian ships stationed in Massawa.

On April 3, the "Swordfish" attacked some Italian DDs in the Red Sea sinking the "Sauro" and also damaging the “Manin” while "Blenheim" bombers hit the "Battisti", the "Pantera" and "Tigre" who had intentionally run aground on the coast of Saudi Arabia.

Bombing and strafing RAF/SAAF followed one another in different locations and northern airports and between these Otumlo-Massawa, Gondar, Dessie, Shashamane, Alomatà, Kombolcha destroying on the ground nine bombers, damaging another 7 and knocking down 3 CR.42 a pilot of one - Lt. Caldonazzo - jumped by parachute was strafed and killed during the descent.

On April 10, the Empire Air Force had 2 SM.79, 4 Ca.133, 5 CR.42 and 2 CR.32 efficient while another 6 aircraft including bombers and fighters were under repair. A total of 20 airplanes was all that remained of the force available until 10 January amounted to about 200 aircraft.

But the carnage was not yet complete because the few airfields remaining efficient to the R.A. they were systematically monitored, attacked, with bombers and fighters and other aircraft were lost forever or irreparably damaged due to lack of spare parts.

Between 1 November 1940 and 15 April 1941 the RAF had suffered on the north theater operating loss of 67 aircraft (48 bombers - 19 fighter). Minor losses to the south, where more modest was found the presence of Italian planes.

On April 3, Adigrat was occupied and the local garrison was moved to Amba Alagi. The concentric advance of the enemy was now clearly emerging.

On April 3, in place of the dissolved north theater was constituted the theater Alagi - Dessiè Command (Gen. Frusci) who had employed the 211th Cacciatori d'Africa Regiment, a CC.RR. Battalion, the Azzurro Scioa-Harrarino Battalion" a Engineer Battalion and some gun batteries for a total of about 4000 men under the command of Gen. Marino Valets-Borgnini, the commander of the sector.

It was also thought to rely on the armed forces of Ras Seyum Mangasha who had 7,000 irregulars at his disposal, but after the fall of Cheren and Asmara he completely defected and sided with the English and the Negus, to whom he submitted, and, by inciting the Tigrai, the Agome and the Scire, he participated in the siege of Amba Alagi with a mass of around 10,000 raiders.[183]

Gen. Faronato new commander of the Air Force AOI after capture at Amba Alagi of Gen. Pinna, in conversation with Gen Sabatini commander of the aviation sector south and other officer aviators.

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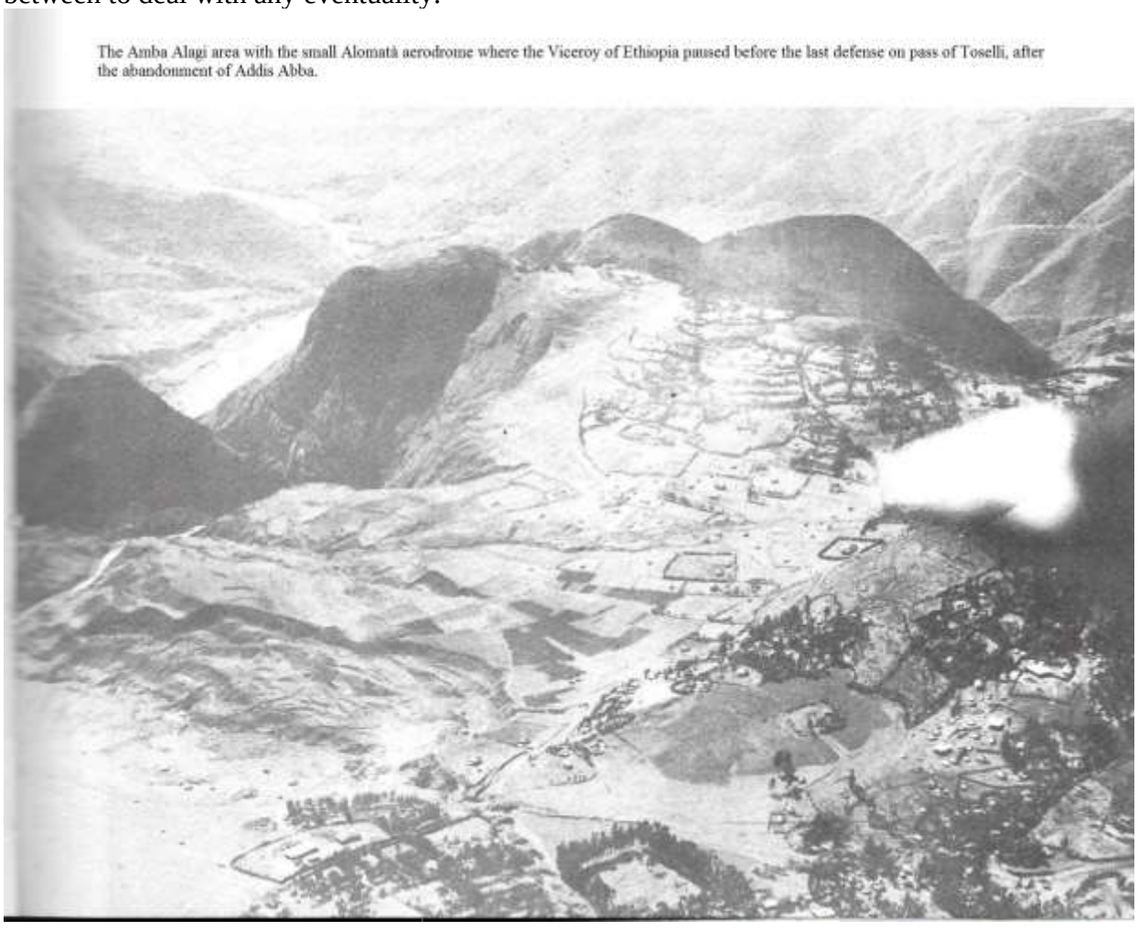
Non-destruction of the artifacts on the Addis Ababa-Dessie Road racing with its 350 km. full of viaducts, bridges and tunnels, greatly facilitated the march of the enemy motorized units and only few destruction carried out slowed the advance of South Africans.

From the date of establishment of the Azzurra Division of the Air Force, the R.A. of the E.A. had formed 4 Battalion regularly numbered one to four, three independent companies and several independent units that will follow different roads and destinies. Later in the fort of Gondar, it will also be constituted the 5th Azzurra Battalion and with other units recovered from other sectors will give life to the 22nd Azzurra Brigade under the command of Col. Dario Busoni.

Total will participate in the military operations in the Azzurri departments, no less than 4,000 men between the national and colonial R.A.

KISMAYO/MASSAUA

After the loss of the DD "Nullo" and Submarines "Macallè", "Torricelli", "Galvani" in 1940, the Navy Command of E.A. in anticipation of the English offensive strengthened the defenses of the naval bases of the Empire: Massawa, Assab, Kismayo including the territory between to deal with any eventuality.[184]



The Amba Alagi area with the small Alomatà aerodrome where the Viceroy of Ethiopia paused before the last defense on pass of Toselli, after the abandonment of Addis Abba.

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The first naval base to be hit by the English offensive was Chisimaio in the south under the command of C.V. Fucci, later replaced by C.C. Campacci-Baligioni, who had at his disposal for defense some 120/45 batteries, an aircraft spotting network with peripheral lookout stations connected by telephone or field radio, a few reinforced concrete machine guns, and for the defense of the naval base, 2 R.E. field batteries, and a colonial Btg. for anti-landing purposes.

Special agreements made with the Air Force Command and the Navy/Somalia, the southern sector were very effective to counter the enemy's initiatives, with attacks of bombers against English ships that on several occasions shelled areas of military interest of Somalia to escort the ships assigned to the small vessels departing from Kismayo where the opportunity of this service a small airfield had been set up to the east to Burgao, terminal of the protection route. In the second half of January 1941 had started as already described the enemy offensive. On February 10, came flying to Mogadishu, Amedeo of Savoy for to see for himself the situation in Somalia and to establish directives for the defense of the Somali territory, inspecting the Juba defensive line and strengthening work in Kismayo, giving provisions to defend left bank of the Juba abandoning Kismayo if necessary, no longer defensible.

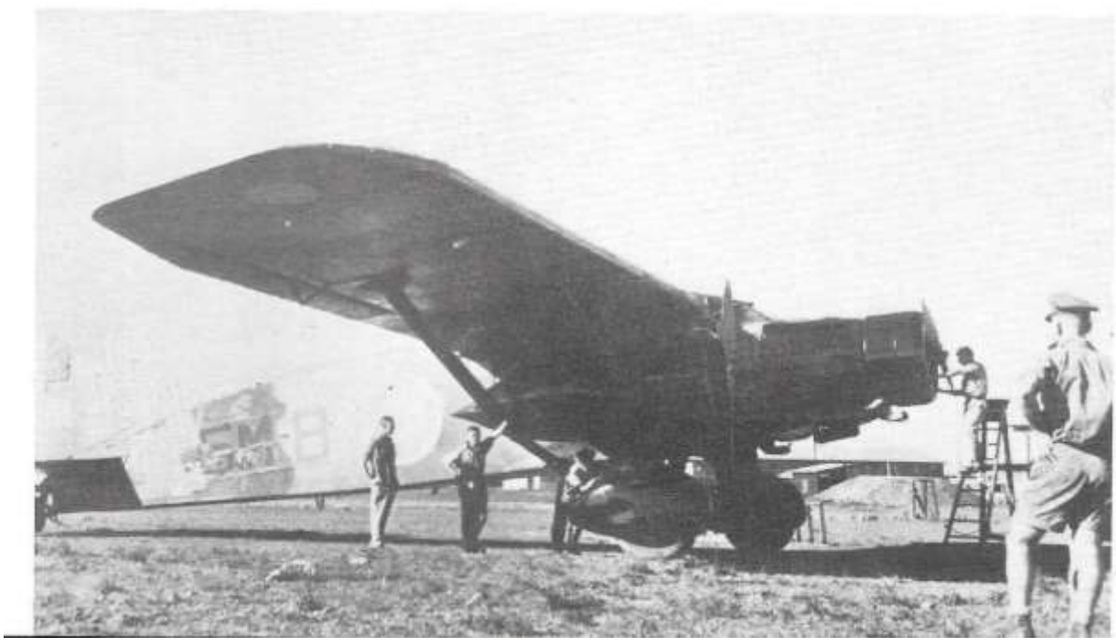
Were scuttled ships in conditions of inefficiency, made to depart for neutral countries those efficient, transferred to Mogadishu ships of exculpatory evidence, unused coastal batteries, destroyed the non-evacuated material, transferred the navy personnel (600 national and 400 colonial) to Juba. In the evening of 19 February, Kismayo threatened by the enemy was finally abandoned.

For the defense of Juba the Navy formed a rifle Battalion commanded by Commander Campacci - Baligioni, equipped with excellent, individual armament and automatic weapons including 10 Breda cal. 13.2 machine guns. A Battalion that from February 13 to 22 took part validly in the fighting while under significant airstrikes bombing and strafing in the Juba area which was defended valiantly against opponents in combat armored vehicles losing about 200 men among the dead, wounded and missing 60% of the force the Battalion.

The A/A gunners Royal Navy/Somalia during the battle of Juba managed to shoot down four enemy aircraft flying at low altitude. The surviving Navy/Somalia sailors followed the fortunes of the south theater troops retreating towards Harrar.

Even groups of airmen from Somalia assisted in the defensive operations in the Kismayo area even before they were made up in the Azzurri Battalion. After losing Asmara, the attention of the English concentrated on Massawa whose port and related equipment were very useful to England to continue the war in the Red Sea and guarantee the route to the Suez Canal.[185]

A Ca.133 of the G.S. west theater Sqd., captured and released to service by the SAAF. With these antiquated bombers who had an average age between 5/7 years of service, AOI aviation worked until the end of the campaign (IWM)



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The command of maritime fortress of Massawa was entrusted with the responsibility of Adm. Bonetti and defense consisted of some fortifications facing the sea and around the outside perimeter of the city, with anti-ship/anti-aircraft emplacements of the Navy and of course the garrison consists of a grenadiers Battalion, two CC.NN., an alpine, Finance Guards, sailors and gangs of Ascari Amhara later disarmed for unreliability.

Under the energetic leadership of its Commanding Admiral, Massawa was strengthened and prepared for the defense of the land front, the most exposed to the dangers, because the sea defensive with its coastal batteries appeared well garnished with guns 76/50, 120/45,102/35 and 76/30, with barrages of mines anchored in strategic points and access to the Port and among the crown of islands placed before the city.

A plan of defense in common between the Armed Forces, had been prepared since January 27, 1941 by agreement between Gen. Trezzani, Gen. Frusci, Gen. S.A. Pinna and Rear Admiral Mario Bonetti, who on this occasion received from the Armed Forces Chief of Staff of E.A., the officer in charge of the fortress commander.

This was established as a sailors Battalion of 600 men, a R.M. truck battery with 4 - 76/30 guns and mobile group with 25 mm. and 13.2 mm. A/A machine guns while asking the Army to send two battalions of CC.NN. and G.d.F., a group of artillery pieces 77/28 and 100/22, two A/A batteries of 40/39 and 76/40 by also using 12 Germans 75/22 guns for Afghanistan and blocked by the hostility in the warehouses of Massawa. After the fall of Keren reached Massawa 2300 survivors of the garrison men commanded by Gen. Carnimeo while the northern Anglo-de Gaullist moved in stages a force towards the coast in an attempt to prevent a further strengthening of Massawa in anticipation of the fall of Asmara. These forces included the Brigg's Force, part of the 5th Anglo-Indian Inf. Div. and a de Gaullist Legionnaires Battalion.

An evacuation plan of naval ships present at Massawa had been similarly prepared as if a blockade of the port by the Royal Navy prevented any further movement of the Italian ships.

The plan included the transfer of ships and submarines to bases under Axis control, an attack of DDs against enemy bases in the Red Sea, the scuttling of ships unable to leave Massawa, destruction equipment, port facilities, warehouses and materials of the naval base.

The early March left for Bordeaux the submarines "Perla", "Ferraris", "Archimede", "Guglielmotti" destined to Betasom whereas previously had set sail for Japan the R.N. "Eritrea", "Ramb" I and II with the exception of "Ramb I" intercepted and sunk by the British they reached Kobe.

They were put back into the efficiency the ships of the 3rd and 5th DD squadrons with the technical help coming from Italy by air with aircraft of SAS, in forecasting studied by Supermarina agree with the Navy command E.A, to make an attack on Port Sudan, to implement the scuttling in the vicinity of Saudi coasts or attempt if possible, an attack en masse on Suez relying on the Luftwaffe to make a bombing raid on the port mining the channel inputs to prevent the influx of enemy ships.

This combined mission, while ensuring the command of X Flieger Korps the necessary information on the sector area and aerial surveillance, was later abandoned for a number of difficulties have arisen in Germanic aviation.

On 31 March came from Massawa the 5th DD Sqd. with "Pantera", "Leone" and "Tigre" directed towards Port Sudan. Shortly after the DD "Leone" bumped into a submerged rock, caught fire, embarked water and was lost after the crew had been picked up by the other two DD who then returned to port.

On 2 April the 5th Sqd. came back with the two surviving DDs. followed shortly later by the 3rd DD Sqd. with "Nullo", "Sauro" and "Battisti". At about 16:00 the Italian ships were attacked by enemy aircraft that while not causing particular damage had canceled the surprise of the mission which still continued.

On the following night technical problems to the boilers the "Battisti" unable to continue regularly asked to scuttled on the Saudi coast and abandoned the formation that shortly later at 06:30 was again spotted by enemy aircraft and attacked without obvious damage.[186]

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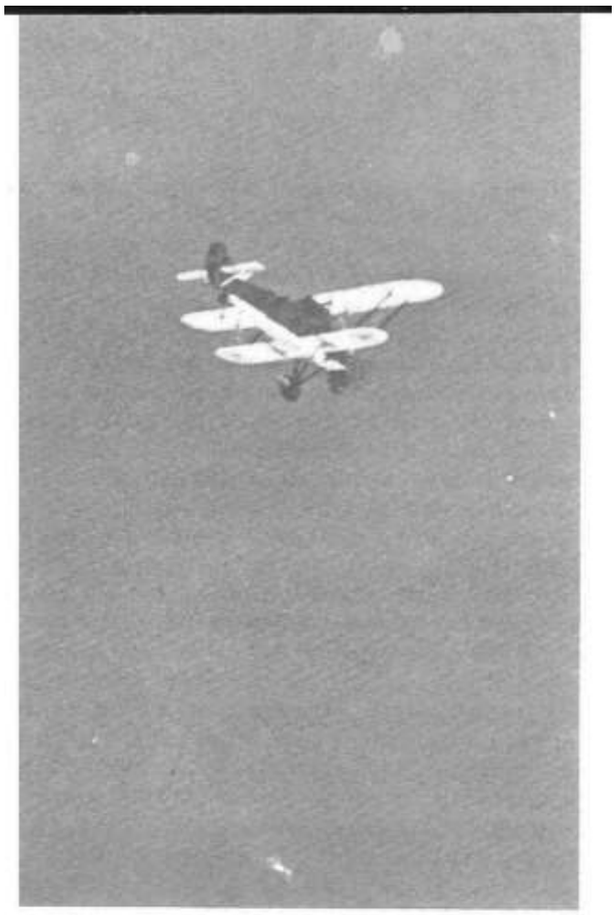

A CR32 Air Force west sector command in flight in the region of the Galla and Sidama. Broken links with the mother country with the northern bases, the SAS operated airports in the west and the Danakil.

From 07:30 began the ever more frequent attacks of British aircraft (R.A.F. and torpedo bombers of the F.A.A.) in that point of time hit 08:00 “Manin”, at 09:00 am the "Sauro" sinking with the death of 78 officers and sailors, at 11:00 again "Manin" sinking an hour later. In the afternoon it was the turn of the "Tigre" hit at 14:20, and the "Pantera" severely damaged at 18:40 and both destroyers sank near the Arab coast for planed scuttling after found it impossible to save the two dying ships. Two enemy bombers were shot down by antiaircraft weapons aboard.

The planned offensive operation ended tragically with the loss of all 6 E.A. Destroyers of the Italian Navy.

Luckiest MAS of the 21st Sqd. who managed to torpedo and damaged the cruiser “Capetown” of 4500 GRT. hit by MAS 213 (G.M. Valencia) assisted by MAS 216.

The first ground combat were manifested in the morning of April 3 and was prolonged with increasing intensity until the 8th when the British supported by air forces in the days before had ascertained the defensive situation of the fortress by detecting fire centers, batteries, fortified strongholds, the weaknesses of the Italian deployment, were launching the main attack using “Mathilda” tanks because of obstinate tenacity of the defenders.

Participated in the attacks of the 7th and 10th Indian infantry Brigades, the "Free France" Brigade, a squadron of tanks, two field artillery Regiments backed by bombers of the SAAF with "Wellesley" attacking the coastal batteries of the Navy in action on the inner defensive perimeter.

The evening of 8 April 1941 Massawa yielded after the garrison had destroyed all the batteries some of which continued to fire until the day after inflicting considerable loss to the English. Noteworthy is the behavior of the. G.d.F. Battalion, who had fought with great courage.

At 14:00 after the enemy validly backed by heavy I tanks had penetrated deeply into the city, Adm. Bonetti ordered the lowering of the flag with military honors, were scuttled all the ships in port, destroyed depots, warehouses, materials, ammunition, workshops, docks and the arsenal and between the naval units MAS 204, 210, 213, 216, the R. torpedo boat "Orsini", the gunboat "Biglieri", the mine-laying ship "Ostia", 7 tugs, 2 tankers, fleet auxiliary, the speedboats. The speedboat of the R.A. RAMA 110 under the command of C.C. Albini and carrying a group of airmen and sailors could breach the English blockade net and reach the coast of Saudi Arabia.

Were captured in Massawa about 10,000 Italian soldiers, Admiral Bonetti and 4 Army Generals, overwhelmed a group of German sailors who had refused to surrender barricading themselves in a building of the harbor.

Serious raids were carried out by the French legionnaires who by order of the British commander were expelled from the village, he regretting to having made them enter the city knowing how they would behave with the civilian population.

On April 19, the last small Italian garrison in the archipelago of islands Dahlac stopped the fight. The whole Eritrea, the oldest and the most faithful of the Italian colonies in Africa, was lost forever![187]

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THE DEFENCE OF AMBA ALAGI

Beginning enemy general offensive on E.A. had lasted just over two months because the British were able to obtain with surprising ease and speed, large military results, strategic, political, psychological.

These unimaginable results could certainly be modified or altered in their vastness and importance, reduced and sized for effect, made more bloody and heavy for the invaders, put in time in the broader context of the entire conflict.

Unfortunately there was not any of this, and despite the numerical supremacy of the Italian Armed Forces over the English, contributed to the realization of the enemy hits the lack of suitable material to counter the British technological superiority and eye-catching setting of strategic and tactical errors, which adversely dictated the course of the war.

The solutions proposed to the Viceroy Amedeo d'Aosta by the GS Supercomando E.A.. to continue the resistance in the reduced strategic area and offer the invader a tough and demanding campaign were four:

1) Region of Arussi the geographical center of Ethiopia - deemed too vast and exposed to attacks from multiple directions, was scrapped.

2) Region of Galla and Sidama S. W Addis Ababa -Terrain suited to a more rational defense but already subject to leakage and enemy pressures from Sudan that prevented an adequate defensive structure.

3) Region of Goggiam -Terrain suitable for defense, it underwent a long guerrilla war by Senussi elements.

4) Enderta Region north of Addis Abeiba with high mountain ranges, at the turn of the road communications between Addis Ababa- Dessiè-Macallè-Adua -Eritrea and not too far away from the regions of Amara, Tembien, Uolcait . Finally it was this latter solution that was chosen by the G.S., considering the limited experience in operating and logistical issues that possessed the Viceroy with a professional background essentially aeronautical setting, well knowing that this solution offered no alternative but an honorable resistance followed by the surrender.

It also reduced the function of interrupting the enemy line of communications between Ethiopia and Eritrea, creating logistical difficulties, and then had a strategic military value.

The strategic reduction with northern Amba Alagi (epicenter m. 3411) had its territorial limits at Dessiè (200 km south), Antalo to the north, Sacotà to the west and Sereba to the east.

They were also created external peripheral defensive sectors of Dessie (Gen. Varda) and Danakil (Col. Raugei) while the Macallè-Antalo sector was given to Gen. Valets-Borgnini. The three sectors then converged on the Amba Alagi theater (Gen. Frusci).

The influx of troops began with the units of the former North theater that fell back from Eritrea and those of the south theater (Somalia) and east retreating from Addis Ababa and surrounding regions. The decision to withdraw on Amba Alagi was taken by Amedeo di Savoia-Aosta after the advice of Gen. Volpini - his aide - and the little G.S. that the viceroy wanted to follow in the extreme defense that it was going to support, was representative of all the E.A. Armed Forces and included the Gen. Trezzani, Frusci, Tramontano, Cordero di Montezemolo, Pinna.

Departing from Addis Ababa on the evening of April 3, Amedeo d'Aosta since February General of the Air Army of the Italian Air Force, had spent the night at the small airfield of Alomatà, that in the following days probably for reporting of indigenous informants, it was bombed by the RAF that set afire some planes dispersed to the bush edge.

In the wake of the Viceroy also he moved the 3rd Azzurro Battalion formed with the R.A. personnel from Addis Ababa, Dessiè consists of pilots, specialists and airmen of the colonial government of the R.A. for a total of about 250 men armed with rifles and SAFAT 7.7 machine guns removed from aircraft. Two machine guns platoons of the same unit were assigned to the command of the Viceroy.

After retiring on Amba Alagi with the Viceroy, Gen. Pinna with his new Chief of Staff Col. Mario Pezzi assisted by Lt. Mario Villani formally entrusted the command of the E.A. Air Force to Gen. Faronato, assigned the defense of Dessie the 3rd Azzurro Battalion strength of 350 national and 400 indigenous, while the Air Force representative in the fort of Amba Alagi in the wake of the Viceroys was initially made up of a machine-gun company of 112 men, used for the A/A defense of the command headquarters.[188]

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Initially, 4 CC.NN. Bns., 3 national Bns., 1 machine gun Bn., 1 Navy Bn., 1 Azzurro Bn., 1 Engineer Bn., 10 artillery groups, 5 colonial Bns., 1 Cavalry Sqd., minor Engineer units, artillery, road transport, and services flowed into the redoubt. At least 4 colonial Bns. among those designated deserted en masse and 2 national Bns. were overwhelmed before reaching the area to be defended.

The English units of the South African 11th Inf. Div. joined tens of thousands of illegal Abyssinians, reinforced by deserters and organized by the British military.

* * *

The month of April 1941 was for the E.A. Air Force the darkest period, demeaning and negative, on record since the war began in the Empire territories.

In this month the air superiority of the enemy was complete, total and irreversible; there was not any conflict except in some gorgeous but isolated episodes of valor, which had more flavor of pride untamed of effective, reactive capacity to the tragic reality, dramatic and humiliating situation created.

The enemy aviation attacks occurred a little anywhere in conjunction with the evolution of the military situation. The airports of Dessie, Addis Ababa, Massawa, Jimma and other smaller fields were attacked and evacuated in the order for large equipped bases Asmara, Addis Ababa, Massawa, Dessie among the best of E.A. with losses of the few efficient or repairable aircraft.

Only some offensive actions were carried out strafing and machine gunning by aircraft on the Addis Ababa-Dessie national road, were shot down by our fighters 5 enemy planes and another 2 were destroyed by flak reaction of the land units.

Since the British offensive against E.A. had traveled 2700 km in eight weeks being able to occupy the most important cities in Ethiopia: Asmara, Mogadishu and Addis Abeba.

Other attacks were made from Kenya with the occupation of Javello and Neghelli, from Aden against Somaliland with the recapture of Berbera, Eritrea with the occupation of Mekele and Adua and Suldan with the conquest of Debra Marcos.

Two special English units had also helped to stir up the border populations, first with the Sandford mission that he had prepared for the arrival in Ethiopia of Haile Selassie and then the Wingate Mission that had formed the unit of the future Ethiopian force under the direct orders of the Negus.

In March, Ailè Selassie moved from the shelter of Mount Balaya to Burie in Goggiam between Danghila and Debra Marcos having, provided certain Ethiopian Battalion and the "Gideon Force" of Wingate, and after the occupation of Addis Ababa shifted westward to Debra Marcos.

In May aboard an old “Valentia” Haile Selassie arrived at the airport of Addis Ababa welcomed by Col. Wingate.

After 5 years of exile the Negus resumed possession of his imperial Ghebbi which he left in May of 1936.

The first exploratory attack on most advanced post on the Dessie sector position appeared on April 17 and took place with the usual operating mode of the British in E.A. - large deployment of artillery and aviation attacks with bombings, strafing and machine gunning followed by attacks motorized infantry supported by “I” tanks and disruptive actions of Abyssinian bands. The offensive was preceded by a propaganda campaign printing appeals to surrender and desertion with threats not assume any responsibility for the British for the physical protection of the Italian population by Abyssinian reprisals, psychological intimidation this extremely serious which involved a precise and resentful stance of the Viceroy of Ethiopia to the British authorities, directly held accountable before the world, the protection of women, children and the elderly.

Once again the mass desertions of colonial units put in crisis the defense and it was possible to rely on the few and faithful battalions of Ascari and national units who fought as always with determination and value.

As of 15 April 1941 the losses observed in the national personnel of E.A added up to 340 officers dead, 325 missing, 680 officers wounded and 6,213 non-commissioned and troops killed, 26,954 missing and 9,395 injured. At that same date the R.A./E.A. had 605 officers, 857 non-commissioned officers, 3,488 enlisted and national airmen for a total of 4,950 men.[189]

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From 22 to 26 April the fighting raged for the defense of Dessiè and Combolcià but the enemy attacks managed to isolate the connections between the Dessiè sector and that of Dancalia, whose units were considered by the sector command to be detached from the defensive axis Dessiè-Ualdia-Quoram-Mai Ceu and therefore operated in isolation in the Batie-Sardò-Sifani-Assab area where the 4th Azzurro Battalion was also located.

The 2nd Azzurro Battalion formed in Dire Dawa had moved to and later fighting in the area of Dessie under the command of Capt. Zanzottera, had fought with valor at Gossie south of Lake Marbar, being almost completely destroyed in the fighting, counting as the only effective weapons the SAFATs removed from the aircraft.

Among the prisoners stood out as a major figure Sergeant Aroldo Soffritti of the 412th Sqd. CT, with 8 aerial victories and numerous other aircraft destroyed on the ground in cooperation with the other squadron pilots.

On 26 April, the British occupied Dessie with the lost of 740 national among dead, wounded and missing in defensive battles, and only 9 colonial to show that the main effort in the fight had been carried out exclusively by Italians and that only on our countrymen it was now possible to create conditions moral and volitional struggle.

On May 1, the limited defense was confined to the mountain massif of Amba Alagi on which to shelter behind with his soldiers Amedeo di Savoia-Aosta determined to defend themselves to the last.

The limited central defensive of the Amba Alagi sector was divided into three areas to be protected: Alagi commanded by (Gen. Valets-Borgnini), Falagà area (Col. Postiglione), Toselli area (Col. Delitala), Togora area (Col. Largajolli).

Part of the 3rd Azzurro Bn. "Scioa-Harrarino" also contributed to the defense of Amba Alagi - the central sector of the redoubt - while General Pinna was part of the GS of the redoubt, as aeronautical consultant to the Viceroy.

In a short time from the start of the enemy offensive, the Empire Air Force had melted away his command and in his peripheral organization and only minor commands and isolated units existed and fought.

The forces from Eritrea composed essentially by the 5th Anglo-Indian Inf. Div. (Gen. Mayne) had to attack Amba Alagi from the north and the 1st South African Brigade Group of the 11th Inf. Div. (Gen. Dan Pianaar) would attack from the south. Gen. Platt had been designated as responsible for the operation by Gen. Wavell.

The main attack English began on May 1st with violent artillery fire on the reduced defensive not riveted to the long range effectiveness deficiency, and infantry attacks to occupy more favorable tactical positions backed by repeated bombing and strafing of the RAF. The preparatory action went on for several days with less and less reactive capacity on the Italian side for lack of suitable material.

On May 8, after the mass desertion of about 900 colonial, remained to defend the Mount Alagi 4 national Battalions composed of soldiers of all arms, specialties and services of the Army, Navy and Air Force subjected day and night bombing and artillery fire (12.000 shells were fired in a week) and over 100 hours of bombing and strafing planes were registered in attacks while the entire mountain range was besieged on all sides with the participation of the armed bands of Ras Sioum who had tenaciously hindered the Italian soldiers already in the conquest of Ethiopia in 1935-36. The attack on Kombolcha represented a serious obstacle for the British, especially counter battery artillery and two pieces of the Navy transported from Assab and put into battery in the Ghedem area, and then made to fall back on Amba Alagi.

On May 13, Amedeo of Savoy issued the following agenda to the garrison of Alagi:

"To all the commands.

To avoid false hopes in the weak souls, brought to the attention of all the officers as follows:

1) preliminary meeting initiatives were always taken by British and not by me;

2) English simply call for the unconditional surrender and then the imprisonment of all the Empire Armed Forces;

3) To lead us to accept they threaten to abandon the fury of indigenous the women and children of the territories they hope to occupy;

4) I refuse to accept the distinctly vulgar blackmail and ordered that everywhere the fight be pushed to the bitter end."

The Viceroy of Ethiopia
Governor E.A.
Superior Commander of the Armed Forces
-Amedeo of Savoy -[190]

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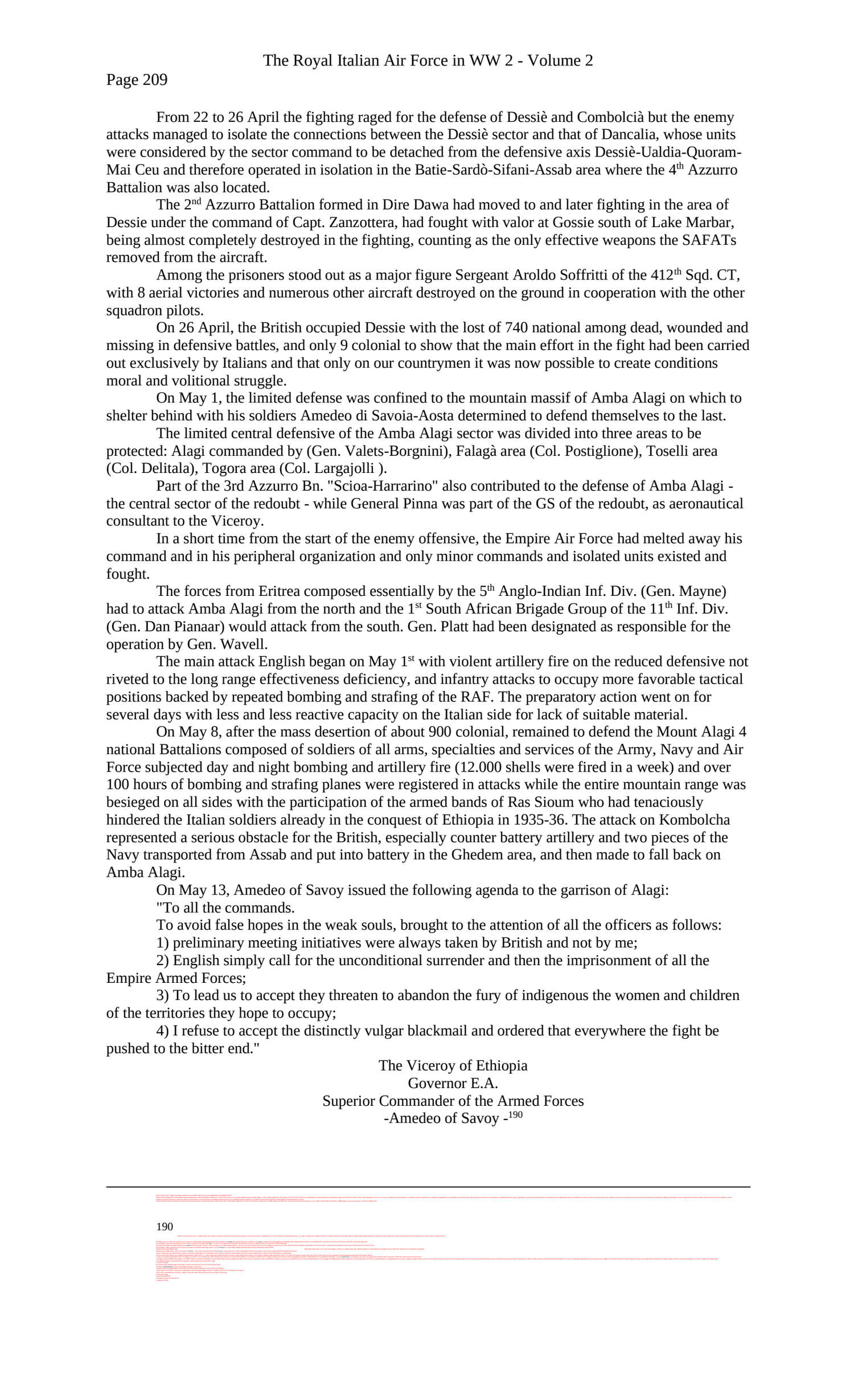

The next day, Mussolini sent the following telegram to the Viceroy: "About additional resistance Amba Alagi, if you can not evacuate the wounded as you do at a given moment, your consciousness of man and soldier there said. All admire and know your temperament and everyone will have full understanding for what you decide. Mussolini." On May 14, the British occupying a position they launched the decisive attack one after the other and squeezing more and more the circle, towards the top of the mountain.

For three long days the enemy artillery and the air force gave no respite to the garrison preventing all movement in the area and on the 17th the Viceroy asked Rome by radio for permission to make a truce in an untenable and tragic situation. The authorization was granted and negotiations with Gen. Platt to arrange the surrender was completed with military honors granted by the enemy to the brave Italian garrison. The message of the Duca d'Aosta concluded with the following words: "... I follow my destiny comforted to have done all my duty. Amedeo of Savoy."

During negotiations with the English, the irregular Abyssinian killed Gen. Volpini and his escort on the way to the English advanced command of Alagi and the Viceroy sought and was granted the handing over of remains and military honors to the fallen.

The 19th the Viceroy sent to Mussolini his last message from Amba Alagi confirming the need to assist the many wounded left without assistance, asking the enemy an honorable surrender. The telegram ended with the following sentences: "... it is comforting in this sad hour the certainty of having done everything humanly possible. I leave the command thanking You, Duce, that in a year of hard struggle more and you allowed me the use of your consent and your trust. The war is not over: to these lands, once again irrigated by Italian blood for the most greatness of our homeland, we will return soon."

The same day came Mussolini's answer: "Yes, highness, You and your soldiers have fought heroically and endured beyond the limits of human possibilities. The Italian people followed, admires and shares your certainty for about tomorrow".

On May 19, occurred the yield with the survivors marching before the English units which made the honors and the same day the Supreme Command appointed Gen. Peter Gazzera new Superior Commander of the Armed Forces that in contemplating assumed the office of Governor regent the General Government E.A..

Among the arrangements pertaining to the surrender with the honors of the garrison of Amba Alagi, in addition to the safety standards set for delivery to the British command of the artillery, ammunition depots and materials, the time of the gathering was scheduled for 08:00 am of the day on May 19 on the square in the fort "Toselli" of infantry troops, CC.RR., the Azzurro Battalion and the adjacent forts engineers, artillery and services.

Armed and equipped troops and the maximum order.

In the afternoon, slipping off at km. 377 of the highway in the following order:

1) Assault Unit,;

2) Mobilized CC.RR .Group

3) Azzurro Battalion.;

4) Platoons representing.

The March will be continued up to Enda Medani where will the surrender of weapons.

The English units in charge of making military honors will be deployed on the right side of the road near the Passo Toselli.

The officers are guaranteed the preservation of the pistol, although this honorable faculty was repealed on the day immediately following the yield in blatant disregard of the agreement made by British commands with the Italians.

The honors of war survivors Italian troops would be made mainly of British regular troops (British and Scottish).

The last hours still available the Italians in the Alagi Area before delivery of weapons to the British, were used by Gen. Pinna to send a message to the aviators of E.A. being forwarded also to Superaereo, with n. 1674, passed on May 18 at 23:55 hours and received in Rome at 04:55 hours of 22 May.

"To the Empire aviators. Amba Alagi after 20 days of fierce resistance had to yield to the overwhelming superiority of forces and enemy vehicles. The 3rd Azzurro Battalion who had been given during the important defense of the Amba sector, has heroically resisted and fought in the artillery positions incessantly pounded and enemy aviation enjoying the praise the Royal Highness the Viceroy of Ethiopia and heartfelt admiration of comrades, infantrymen and artillerymen. I, your commander, I wanted to be among you infantryman and get down in the trenches with you and live your life as ground fighters among you. [191]

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It falls but the high front with the consciousness of having done like you all over the duty to the last. The General Faronato that happens to me in the command, and that for so long has been my faithful and intelligent collaborator, airmen who still fight in the Empire, I address my heartfelt salute.

We must have faith in the destiny of the Fatherland. The final victory will crown all our painful but not inglorious sacrifices for our country and for our Azzurra Arm. Long live Italy, long live the King, Long live the Duce.

Amba Alagi on May 18, 1941 -XIX
Pinna"

The day of May 20 also the King Vittorio Emanuele III sent a telegram to Amedeo of Savoy, communicating his admiration for the behavior of a true commander and soldier shown and giving the gold medal to the military valor deserved together with all combat soldiers in E.A.

Before coming down the mountain he had seen his last battle of the Empire Armed Forces Commander, Amedeo of Savoy wished to pay their last respects to the still fresh grave of his adjutant Gen. Giovan Battista Volpini and those of his companions, leaving a note written in his own hand which was enclosed in a bottle buried in the tomb of Toselli fort that guarded forever the remains of the brave Italian general slain together with his escort by the Abyssinians.

Transferred by the car first to Adi Ugri then to the airfield of Gura in Eritrea, Amedeo of Savoy started on June 5 to Khartoum with an old RAF “Bombay” being flattered when he arrived in the Sudanese capital by the commander of RAF East Africa Commodore Siatter. Another transfer by plane to Nairobi and drive them to Bonyo Sabouk 60 km from the Kenyan capital.

On March 3, 1942, following a pernicious disease* not promptly treated with appropriate therapy, Amedeo di Savoia-Aosta, Commander General of the Armed Forces E.A., Viceroy of Ethiopia, General of the Air Army of the Italian Air Force died peacefully attended by a few officers of his suite and was buried with a simple and austere military ceremony in the small cemetery of Nyon Road.[192]

*reportedly of tuberculosis & malaria

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The End of the NORTHWEST sector

After the surrender of Amba Alagi the military situation in the remaining territories still controlled by the Italian Armed Forces E.A. was becoming more difficult and for many dramatic aspects.

Eliminated theaters of northern, southern and eastern, western and greatly reduced the reduced the western and remarkably contracted the remaining territories formerly to the north theater (Danakil, Goggiam) also remained isolated and without resources to prolong resistance beyond the possible.

In the first 100 days of the start of the offensive against E.A., the British forces had captured 230,000 prisoners and this result virtually eliminated 3/4 of the Italian military potential.

The yield of Amba Alagi with the previous fall of Dessie took place on April 26, had split into two sections of the forces moved between the Shoa, the Goggiam and el Aussa, which followed thereby separately, the evolution of events: part the troops went to reinforce the garrison of Goggiam between Debra Marcos Debra-Tabor and Gondar to the NW of Addis Ababa, others followed so does the fate of Amba Alagi being involved in the events following the fall of the fort, and others found themselves NE, in the region between the Aussa and Danakil in order to barricade themselves in Assab – the last Empire stronghold of the Red Sea and in whose territory it was still possible air links with the motherland via Djibouti.

They numbered altogether around 3000 men of the Army between national and colonial, a Battalion of sailors of the base of Assab and the 4th Azzurro Battalion of the Air Force with 250 men between pilots, and national specialists and 120 airmen of colonial R.A. from the air bases in Addis Ababa, Dessie, Asmara, Harrar, Zula, Massawa.

Altogether no more than 4,000 men with some guns, a few automatic weapons, little ammunition.

North Sector Aviation Command who had moved in late March from Asmara to Dessie with Gen. Piacentini, was also divided into two sections to continue autonomously functionality of two essential aspects of the war in E.A. -1): Hold out for as far as possible the air support to military operations in regions Wollo-Aussa-Shoa after leaving Addis Ababa -2): ensure the continuity of air links with the Motherland overseeing the Aussa-Danakil region which offered them favorable landing terrain.[193]

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Considering objectively that the Air Force center-east sector command (Gen. Collalti) territorial jurisdiction had been transferred by order of Gen. Pinna into the Galla and Sidama region where it reverted also to the south (Gen. Sabatini), the Air Force representative in the northern sector had been entrusted to the Col. Stefano Fedele - already the commander of the airfield of Gura - while Gen. Piacentini with a group of aviators under his command moved to Sardo in Danakil to fulfill the task he had been entrusted to maintain air links with Italy. Gen. Faronato - Chief of the E.A. Air Force appointed new proxy empire air force commander by Gen. Pinna, who had moved to Amba Alagi to follow the fortunes of the Viceroy, was with the advanced command of Mai Ceu -a north of Dessie, with a group of airmen from various foundations and from Addis Ababa. On April 20, while a small Tactical G.S. of the R.A. remained at Mai Ceu with Gen. Pinna, available to the Viceroy, the E.A. Air Force Command was carrying with a long transfer gear from Shoa to Jimma available to the new commander of the Armed Forces E.A Gen. C.d'Ar. Pietro Gazzera, appointed by the Viceroy at the time of the decision to retire on Amba Alagi for the ultimate defense of Italian military prestige.

On that date also Gen. D.A. Luigi Faronato was officially appointed commander of the Air Force of E.A. to ensure the continuity of the Force with the other Armed Forces.

Since that time - 20 April 1941 - the vicissitudes of various E.A. Air Force commands-Sector, zone, region, airports, principals, technical and logistical bases - become fragmented, uncoordinated, independent since generally the sector-certainly the most important commands from a formal point of view - uprooted from their areas of competence, lack of homogeneous units, drastically reduced a few efficient aircraft, transformed institutionally for different tasks contingent needs, will fight honorably up to the extent possible by the dependent commands of the theater or will be isolated and overwhelmed by events.

What remained of the more than 450 airplanes had equipped the aviation of E.A. between 1940-41, was represented in May 1941 by 3 SM. 79, Ca.133, 6 CR.42, 1 CR.32 and 1 Ca.148: 18 airplanes of which only 12 in conditions of efficiency, distributed and dispersed among the western Shewa, the region of the Galla and Sidama and Amara .

On April 26, the eve of the fall of Dessie, Col. Fedele remained in place as of the northern sector command representative, sent to Gen. Piacentini the following telegram: "From this moment ceases the command of north E.A. Air Force sector. It is imminent the delivery of Dessie into the hands of the English representatives. With great pain we carry out the order to hand over to the enemy, however, proud of having done our duty to the end of airmen and soldiers. To you and to wish you much glory fortunate comrades. Viva Italy, Viva the King Emperor, Long live the Duce. Colonel Fedele."

On 1 June Gen. Piacentini then reassumed the Command of Air Force sector North and the moved to Assab, the only strip of territory even equipped in the Danakil, attempted to reorganize and equip the airfields in the area including Didhav, Sardo, Tirodud , Sifani, Acoba on which it was still possible to create links with the mother country via Saudi Arabia-French Somaliland which were ongoing diplomatic negotiations and to ensure CIAF ties with Italy.

In order to achieve these assumptions, Gen. Piacentini had available 35 officers, 148 non-commissioned officers, and graduated airmen along with 54 Air Force Ascari mostly recovered from the northern sector, but also had to strengthen his group, called the “Piacentini Column" with the 4th Azzurro Battalion of Lt. Col. Alberto Del Monte -already commander the 28th Group BT of Zula - who had gathered airmen of the dissolved 25th, 26th and 27th Groups and other fighter elements, services, control of the airport north sector.

The 4th Battalion had done earlier service before at Dessie, then on Camionale Addis Ababa-Dessie and Weldiya-Mai Ceu road and after the fall of Dessie had brought into the territory of Aussa of about 400 airmen strong between national and colonial. Making contact with the Azzurro Battalion, Gen. Piacentini deployed the battalion on the Assab-Kombolcha highway protect the Eli Dahar airfield, and he seconded a company at the command of Capt. Giovannini and 2nd Lt. Grossi near the border with France Somalia and, he reinforced the air force garrison of Assab with technical and logistical support department to restore communications and maintain a minimum of his command efficiency.[194]

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The bulk of the 4th Azzurro Battalion deployed at Manda straddling the highway for Kombolcha.

Because the command of the sector was entrusted by Gen. Gazzera to Army Col. Raugei, Gen. Piacentini was invited to take up with his airmen available to this field command, a thing that the North Air Force commander flatly refused to obey the orders of an officer of lower rank to him. Since that decision the northern sector airmen taking a strong autonomous physiognomy, both trial and operational, still declaring available to operate against the enemy where it was deemed necessary and the military duty.

FALL OF THE ASSAB BASE

The port and maritime military base at Assab in command of the C.V. Bolla, base that could be considered the auxiliary port of Massawa on the Red Sea, after the fall of Massawa was the only port still under the Italian flag on the Red Sea, and was maintained, on the defensive in the hypothesis that it could be useful to its activities in a broader strategic plan which advised its maintenance and ownership.

Assab had lost much of its importance in the spring of 1941, despite having played a role of great importance indicating the passage of 890 ships in the past months of war, had supported the weight of 482 air raids mostly from Aden just a hundred kilometers distant, killing 27 RAF planes mostly Blenheim and Wellesley bombers.

Its defense A.N. consisted of a battery of 152/45 and five of 76/40 A/A supplemented by 18 Breda 13.2 machine guns with 3 electrical searchlights, and 2 Sagnac type aero-phones.

The military garrison was made up in March 1941 by about 4000 between sailors and national and colonial soldiers, but at the end of May remained very little since the bulk of the garrison had been evacuated and used for other tasks (a Battalion formation of the R. Navy had been sent to defend the fort of Amba Alagi) and what was left after the dismantling of coastal batteries sent to Kombolcha in defense of the Dessie-Sardo highway, was reduced to about 1500 soldiers including 250 sailors with two 76/40 pieces, part of which retreated to Battie, which was left almost unguarded by defending the base. This situation induced the British to attempt on April 30th a landing, but it was unsuccessful because the auxiliary cruiser "Parvati" ran into a mine and sank with the loss of 50 crewmen.

The 413th Sqd. CT (Capt., C. Santoro) who initially had been assigned to the defense of the base, was virtually destroyed during several raids on the airfield and it was not possible to rebuilt it.

In this precarious situation and considering that after the departure for Addis Ababa and Dessi, is many thousands of Italian refugees had poured into the town, commander Bolla suggested the possibility to consider the town as "open city" and because indefensible militarily, both to safeguard the civilian population from the war and that the envisaged hypotheses was advanced by the British demands that between May and early June bombers attacked several times with the city, causing casualties among the civilian population, losses grew when British ships they began to shell Assab on several occasions to speed up the collapse and abandonment of the city by the defenders.

Obtained the authority to accept the status of "open city" to Assab, C.V. Bolla made known to Supermarina that when the enemy would have landed in the town, he and his men would withdraw into the Manda Dabu area where Gen. Piacentini also intended to move, to continue the struggle together with airmen and soldiers.

On 11 June Assab was again heavily bombed by the RAF and 4 DDs who fired several broadsides against the city, causing many deaths and injuries among the civilian population. Shortly after Indian troops landed virtually undisturbed since the garrison had meanwhile withdrawn towards Batie, gave themselves to carrying out acts of violence and looting in such a case Commander Bolla thought it his duty to report to the English command, to enforce the "open city" decoration and the suppression of all acts of violence of the British troops. On the day of 12 Assab it was fully occupied.

The occupation of Assab meant penetration into the territory of enemy units from the north- from Massawa on the roadway towards Beilul, from Dessie to Sardo, and thus was blocked to surviving Italian units of Danakil any possibility of maneuver.[195]

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On this occasion Gen. Piacentini saw fit to issue an invitation to the Governor of French Somaliland in order to make provision with humanitarian spirit shelter for the wounded and sick in the Air Force area hospitals, but his plea fell on deaf ears and the insensitivity of the French representative.

Faced with this situation, the commander of the northern sector entrusted to Air Force Lt. Col. Del Monte control of all the Danakil airmen and was taken prisoner at Assalb together to Gen. Liberati, Commander of a Army Division, giving communication of the decision to Gen. Faronato in his headquarters, west of the theater, who as E.A. Air Force commander transmitted by radio to the Supreme Command of the evolution of the situation as at 14 June 1941. On the 18th Gen. Pricolo answered Faronato by telegram no. 1B/11407 as follows: News of the captivity Piacentini & his gallant officers grieves me deeply. I follow day by day fierce resistance of our garrisons with great regret that he could not bring great help as it would be in the heart of all Italians-Pricolo".

The 4th Azzurro Battalion, who had assumed for ease of radio communications the conventional name of "Piacentini Column", gathered other men at Eli Dahar in the Beda valley and moved into the valley of Dgog on Marghebla-Agurto-Dede-Haggaitho-Monghella track near the French border with the intention to be interned to prevent the British captivity, but that intention could not for a series of unfortunate circumstances.

On 1 July the "Piacentini" column who transmitted via Gondar with the "Eolo" service cipher and cipher Table. 12, communicated to Superaereo message with n. 460: “Situation unchanged - 70% of the unit force sick - temperature 45-50 degrees, polluted water effect that causes widespread hematuria & deficiency of necessary medicines strongly affect units efficiency. I confirm absolutely necessary to come to agreements with the French authorities to allow internment & admission of seriously ill & serious injuries. This will give personal peace of mind & writing since consignment to the enemy in addition to repugnant it is impossible, say impossible to uncrossable slopes. Life low in Danakil but is judged by a few cause no discomfort, I now anticipate captivity. Nine Ascari & indigenous volunteers divide our lives for defense and maintaining the flag on Empire lands. Need moral support to personal & assistance above need by our aeronautical authorities. Signal presence for future needs in the areas of Galafi & Urghini immense natural esplanades suitable to employment of aviation. Col. Del Monte.

The dramatic message of the 4th Azzurro Battalion commander, threw into relief the pride and indomitable courage of the surviving E.A. airmen to withstand any adversity even in a terrible and irreversible situation.

Between 1 and 3 July the "Piacentini Column" was harassed by rebels of the Danakil Aussa Sultan, attacking isolated patrols, performing nightly surprises with shootings and causing other injuries among men.

On the day of July 3 was received by Lt. Col. Del Monte a message of the Chief, G.S. of the RA Gen. Pricolo thus delivered: "To Column Piacentini 52669. I express my admiration for your heroic behavior, to confirm material permission the assignment of French Somaliland against shelter at military hospitals that colony injured & sick. I shall again ask the armistice commission to intervene with the French authorities in the above sense. Pricolo".[196]

Losing the technical possibilities of working with SM. 82 because of the limited size of the airport of Azozò, the responsibility to connect Gondar with Italy was entrusted to three-engined SM 75.

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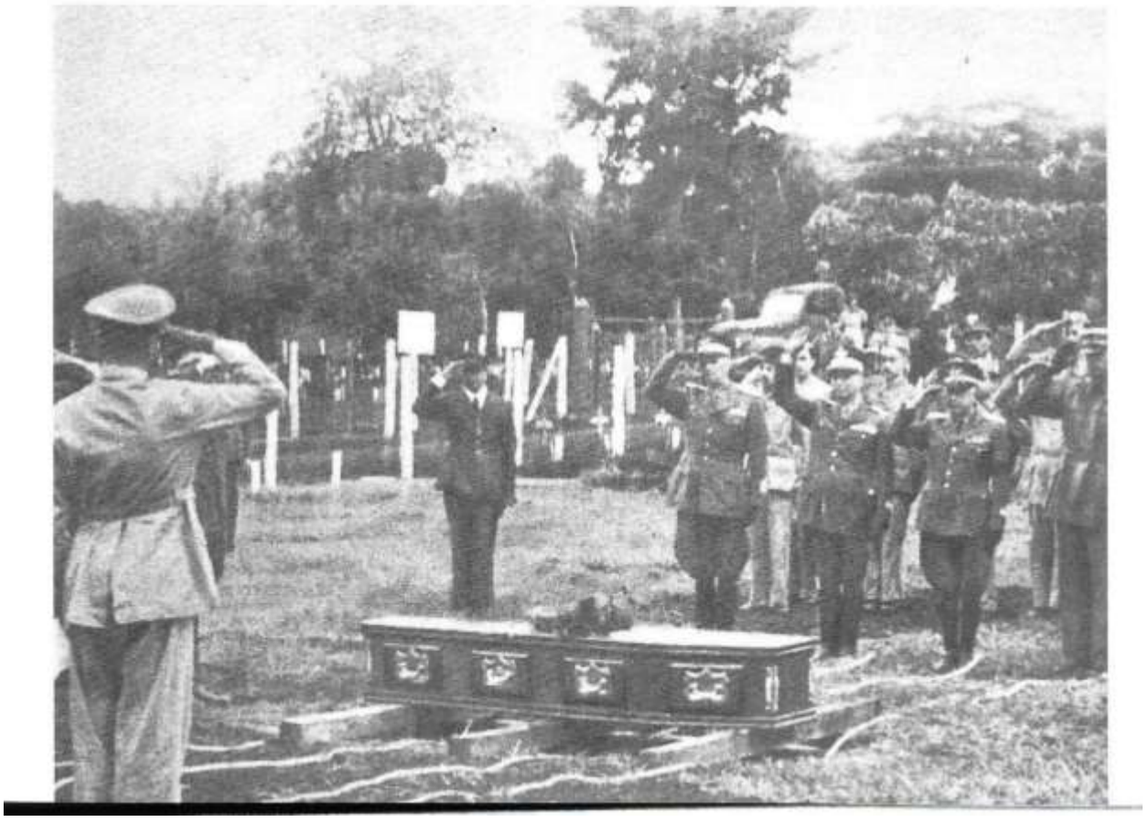
From moment of the enemy occupation of Assab, the military operations in Danakil had stagnated the vastness of the territory, the lack of roads, environmental difficulties, but in early July small Italian garrisons, taken by hunger and thirst had begun to also give in to the terrible physical and moral isolation in which the Italian soldiers found in the Danakil sector. The 4th Azzurro Battalion still held despite the severe crisis that was going through. July 6 groups of irregular aviators attacked but were rejected and the same day was interrupted the highway for Sardo and the unit moved to Tirodud near the Doddaitho pass to take the caravan route that led to Callassa in French Somaliland.

The 7th new attacks of Galla-Azebo warriors to a detachment of the Battalion who went to Djibouti to withdraw funds sent through the CIAF. They were repulsed with losses but now exhausted men had to fall back on the bulk of the Battalion barricaded in defense in the area.

On July 10, after rejecting other rebel attacks, the unit was being over flown by a British plane that threw a message inviting them to the surrender with the honors of war. In this situation of high drama, with the sick and wounded without care and medicines, with men sick to dysentery due to lack of food and polluted water, lack of news and refused by the French authorities, Col. Del Monte not finding another solution than attempt to save his surviving airmen, only Italian soldiers that were still in the Danakil under arms, and accepted the offer of the enemy. On the same day an English motorized detachment arrived with doctors and aid for the men of the "Piacentini Column", helped them and honored them with arms as befits the brave soldiers.

Before destroying the radio, ciphers and anything else useful to the enemy, Col. Del Monte sent the last message to the country so far reported: "General Staff of the Air Force- Rome- English Assab Command communicated by air a message granting military honors rendered to the airmen. [197]

The Nyemi Road Cemetery (Kenya); their last respects to the deceased Amedeo di Savoia Aosla, Viceroy of Ethiopia, General of the Air Army RA died in prison of war March 3, 1942



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The 4th Battalion closes his short life after components have made possible to keep high honor Italian aviators. Long live the King, Long live the Duce, Viva Italy. Col. Del Monte."

And with this latest dispatch he ceased all resistance of the north E.A. Air Force sector.

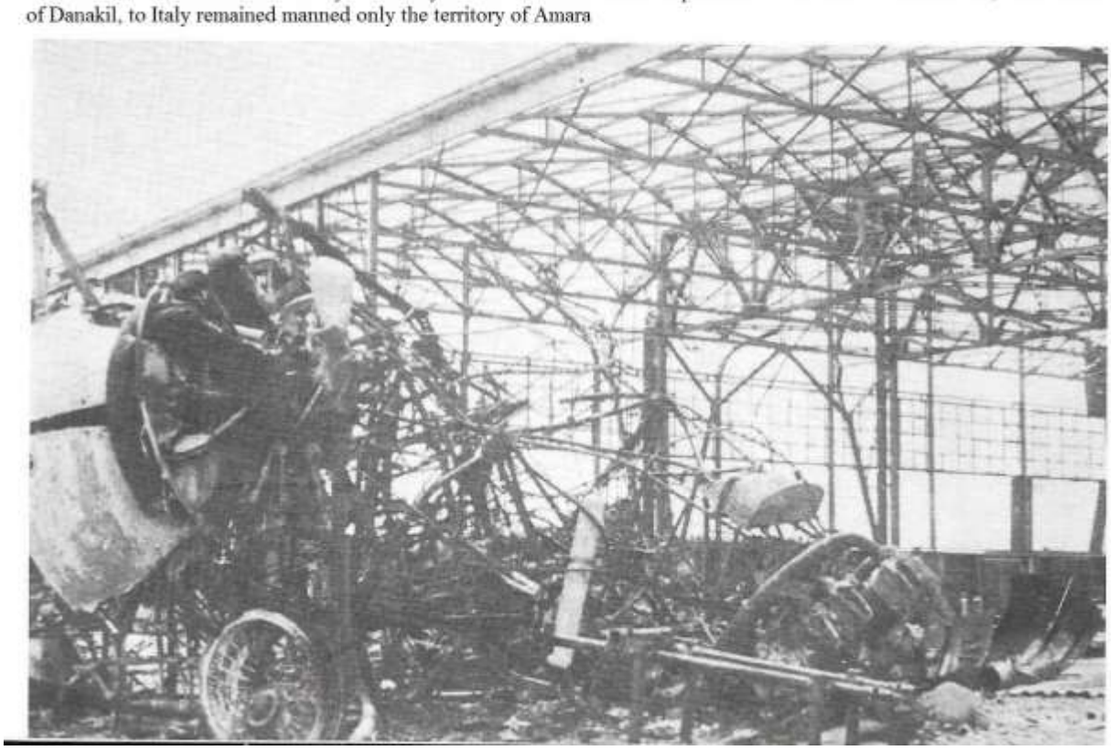
THE WAR IN THE SOUTH -WEST THEATER

The rapid and unexpected conclusion of military operations in Eritrea, Somalia, in the eastern -Somaliland, Shoa, Gojam, Amba Alagi and Danakil, had questioned the reasons for the rapid collapse of the Italian military apparatus apparently more numerous than opponents but substantially weaker and unprepared for a modern war, that Italy was stubborn to want to lead in East Africa but do not have the necessary means and rational ideas for a more congenial kind of war in relation to the number, ability and offensive capabilities available, resources and the will in relation to soil conditions, to the areas on which to fight the guerrillas environmental, climatic and policies against England, the only real existing possibilities in E.A. was to harass the enemy and keep him constantly on alert.

In the late spring of 1941 the British offensive against the E.A. had invested and forced to surrender the two major theaters of the north and east, eliminated the largest sector of Juba isolating with the occupation of the central and southern regions of Ethiopia -Somalia including -the west theater now compressed between Kenya and Sudan to the west, and, starting from the north with an outflanking movement as a large semi-circle had occupied the of the regions Uolcait, Tembien, Enderta, Vollo, Shoa, Arussi that pressed now from the E, NW and Galla and Sidama, Goggian, Amara, which were concentrated the remaining Italian forces.

The English attack strategy against the Empire was gradually taking shape and its development ever more clearly on routes ranging from north to south to the heart of Ethiopia, with the specific intent to isolate the major regions of the East and North-East, and then bring down one after the other garrisons serving to defend individual sectors now subdivided and indefensible.[198]

Destruction and desolation found by the enemy at the abandoned Assab airport lost in the month of June 1941, with the loss of Danakil, to Italy remained manned only the territory of Amara



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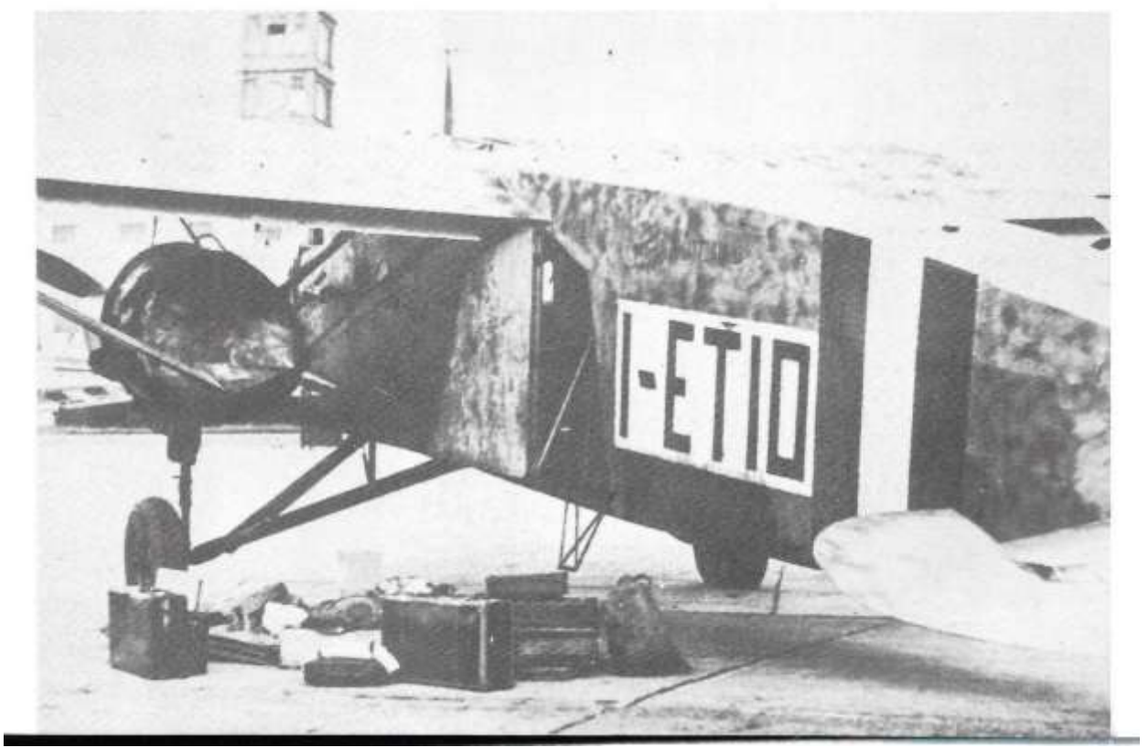
What had been lacking strategically by the Italian side, a simple and homogeneous defensive policy and was particularly noted was the lack of implementation of a rational defensive plan, logically intended to focus on a more limited but well-guarded territory, the bulk of the Empire Armed Forces and all available resources scattered in the various theaters of war, now sector after sector were isolated, attacked by superior forces, well armed and inevitably forced to surrender or destruction. It had not been prepared to regard any plan of sabotage or guerrilla actions, as for months led the British, and this state of affairs had greatly facilitated the advance, the penetration and consolidation the enemy occupation in the delusion and waiting of events that were to change radically outside E.A., the situation.

The largest of the Galla and Sidama land in the western part of Ethiopia under the command of Gen. Gazzera, was manned by the largest contingent in E.A. of Italian troops to about 60,000 men, including four Colonial Divisions: 21st, 22nd, 23rd and 24th, two colonial Brigades, three CC.NN. Battalions, five groups of artillery, 7 autonomous colonial Battalions, a Engineers Battalion, mortar companies, machine guns, motorcyclists, telegraph, Assault, services.

Italian units faced numerous British forces represented by the 1st South African Inf. Div. reinforced by four Inf. Regt. Anglo-Belgian, 15 Independent Inf. Battalions composed of British, Arabs, Rhodesia, Ethiopian, African, Australian; Abyssinian irregular bands, Kenyan, Sudanese artillery groups, machine gun Battalion, armored cars Battalion, transport and services in a large motorized and equipped with modern equipment. Southern Kenya -Sudan Sector Commanded by Gen. Cunningham.

Particularly intense in the sector was the leak activity of Abyssinians represented by irregular formations, deserters, the Shifta band (marauders dedicated to banditry with political label).[199]

The Ca. 148 numbered I-ETIO of the Ala Littoria who succeeded taking off from Gondar to reach first Saudi Arabia and later Italy after an adventurous journey that lasted several months.



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In conjunction with the start of the English offensive in Juba area, the command of the theater with the experience of the past logically reduced the area to be defended abandoning a large part of the territory, concentrating troops and equipment on the first foothills of the plateau more easily controllable and defensible. Even what was left of the R.A. conformed to the new situation.

Were then abandoned air bases Javello, Gardulla, Neghelli, Bonaia, Gambela, Asosa concentrating materials, departments and services in Jimma and adjacent slopes.

The English attack from Kenya and Sudan began gradually and quietly between February and March, and although effectively countered, gained some success thanks to tried and tested armored divisions supported by bombing and strafing aviation, and with the help of local rebellions, ambushes, sabotage, hostile acts, killings of isolated lorry drivers on the Addis Ababa-Jimma and Addis Ababa-Lekemti.

The abandonment of Addis Ababa and of Harrarino brought in April reinforcements under the command of the theater who incorporated some 30,000 men from various units of the theater west of Somalia and now abandoned and occupied by the enemy.

But if new men moved to the threatened southwestern theater, he also drove the enemy to the west of the troops who had occupied Addis Ababa and Shoa, using the south and east of the 11th and 12th Divisions that had since February attacked Somalia in the lower Juba. In this way the region of the Galla and Sidama was to be pressed from two sides and from three directions.

On 30 April the RAF surprises a motorized column in the process of fording the Dadaba river near the pass of Shashamane and destroyed almost completely with repeated bombing and strafing by eliminating the following day even the survivors who had entrenched on Mount Fichè.[200]

The valiant crew of the Ca. 148 I-ETIO (Cmdr. Lisardi) at his arrival Littorio took place October 19, 1941 after 126 days from the start in E.A.

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Were lost between May 10th and the 13th about a thousand men between national and colonial,12 L.35 tanks and 12 M.11/39 tanks, four armored cars and 6 - 77/28 cannons, several dozen trucks effected by intense enemy air force fire.

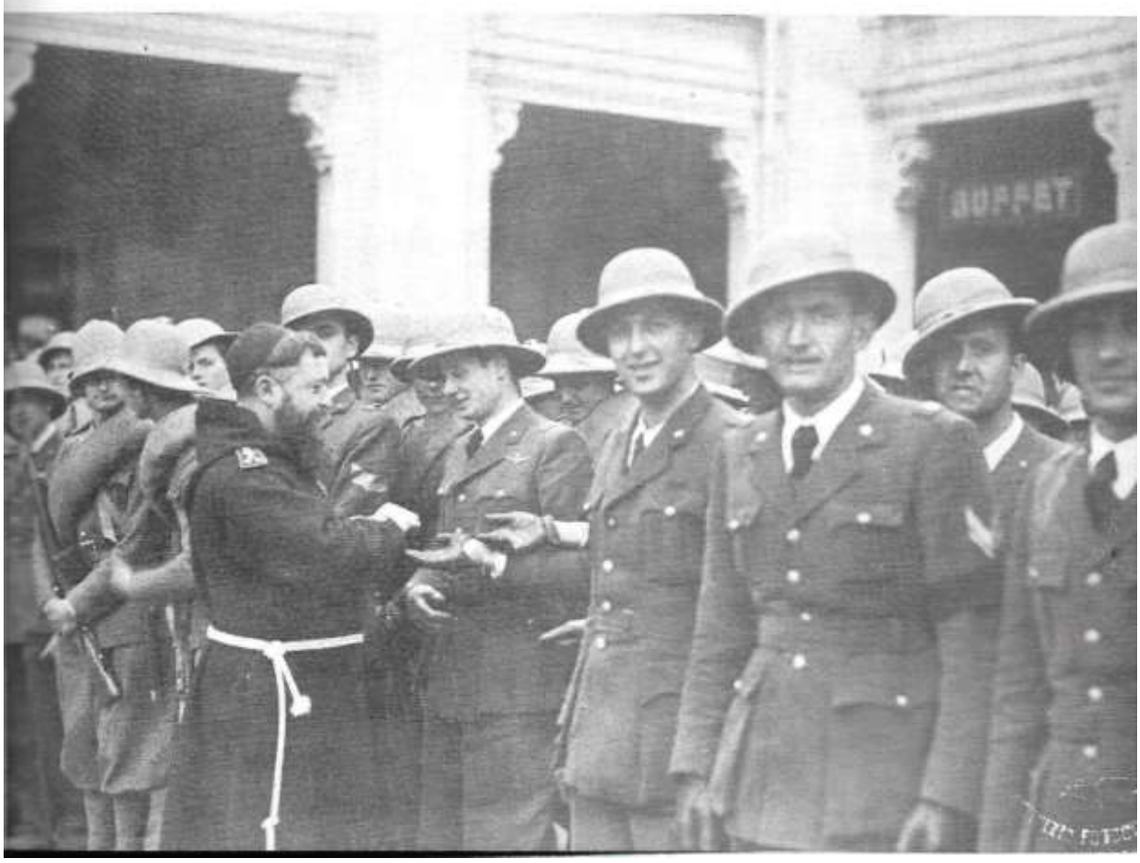
With the aviation personnel remained without airplanes (4 general, 35 officers and more than a thousand officers and NCOs pilots, airmen and specialists) they were made between April and May: 3rd Azzurro Battalion and two autonomous companies of R.A. which they were used to fight as infantry in the west theater.

On May 12 during the march of transfer from Jimma to Bedelle, Gen. Faronato sent by radio to Superaereo new news, stating the forced closure of the base of Jimma now made impassable in Gondar and the transfer of 2 CR.42 and a Ca.148 located in the area to better safeguard them.

Gen. Sabatini with two Azzurro companies Lekemti and Agaró partially withdrawn from Bonaia, he was imprisoned in the fort of last resort to protect the Dembi-Bedelle road, which had his headquarters, in the latter place the H.Q. of the theater command.

On May 12, Gen. Gazzera received via radio from Alagi authorization from the Viceroy, to negotiate the eventual delivery of Jimma to the British, if circumstances demanded for the Protection of Italian civilians seriously threatened with extermination by the rebel Abyssinians and cleverly exploited by the British of P.W.B. (*).[201]

A military chaplain salute a group of pilots and specialists destined to repatriate from E.A. using the tri-motored SM.73 of the Ala Littoria which reached - via Jeddah - Benghazi - the Motherland.



* Psychological Warfare Branch.

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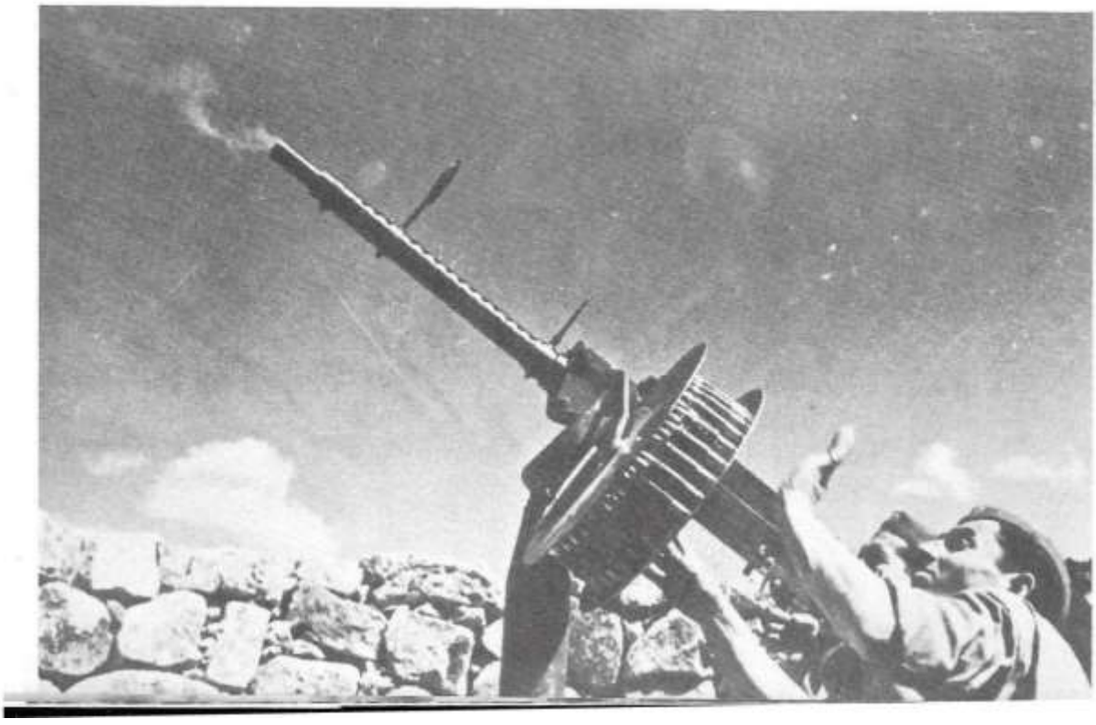
Beginning in May, the British reinforced the RAF-SAAF deployed in Ethiopia and Kenya, and more frequent and heavy air attacks were launched against the Italian units whose colonial battalions, not accustomed and trained to suffer attacks of bombers and fighters with bombing and strafing, easily dispersed fearing attack from the heavens, even defecting for fear of reprisals of the Abyssinians other tribal race, they tried in every way to return to their homelands or more appropriately threw themselves on the winning side by being easily convinced by the English and Negus's propaganda.

The final part of the Ethiopian campaign in the west operating segment, was carried out by Gen. Cunningham with a force equivalent to 4 brigades on 8 available provided by the 1st and 12th divisions in the military operations conducted in the spring in the region of the Galla and Sidama made 33,000 prisoners conquering at the end of June, Jimma, Shashamane, Lekemti after having reinforced the original contingent by two infantry brigades (one of them of colonial Congolese commanded by Belgian officers under the orders of Gen. Gilliaert), with the specific intent to speed up the conclusion the war in Ethiopia and strengthen the Egyptian border in serious danger.

After the conquest of the west sector of Ethiopia, Gen. Cunningham intended to command the 8th Army of the Nile left the East African territory under the command of Gen. William Platt, meanwhile promoted to the next grade and appointed commander in charge of the East Africa Theater.

The Italian retreat under the pressure of the British motorized forces continued wearily with serious difficulties for their losses, the lack of vehicles and fuel, and the flooding of the tracks due to the rainy season and only with the intervention of a few planes was possible fill with drop of supplies by air to units of the 24th Colonial Div. remained isolated near Billate-without bread, sugar, tea. [202]

Besieged in the fortified town of Gondar, the last bulwark of the empire, the E.A. airmen strenuously battle the enemy, A SAFAT shooting at the SAAF planes attacking Azozò



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stoicismo e abitudine d'ufficio degli inglesi del F.W.S. (*).

All inizio del mese di maggio gli inglesi rafforzarono la RAF-SAAF dislocata in Etiopia e Kenia e più frequenti e pesanti attacchi aerei vennero lanciati contro i reparti italiani i cui battaglioni coloniali, non abituati ed addestrati a subire attacchi di bombardieri e caccia con ripetizionamenti e mitragliamenti, si sbandavano facilmente in preda al timore provenente dal cielo, defezionando anche per paura di rappresaglie degli abissini di altra razza tribale, tentavano in tutti i modi di rientrare alle loro terre d'origine o più opportunamente si buttavano dalla parte dei vincitori facendosi facilmente convincere dalla propaganda inglese e negussita.

La parte finale della campagna etiopica nel settore operativo ovest, venne eseguita dal Gen. Cunningham con una forza equivalente a 4 brigate sulle 8 disponibili fornite dalle divisioni 1a e 12a che nelle operazioni militari condotte in primavera nella regione dei Galla e Sidama fecero 33.000 prigionieri conquistando ad fine di giugno Jimma, Scioscioamano, Lekemti dopo aver rinforzato l'originario contingente con altre due brigate di fanteria (una delle quali di coloniali congolesi al comando di ufficiali belgi agli ordini del Gen. Gilliaert), col preciso intento di accelerare la conclusione della guerra in Etiopia e rafforzare il confine egiziano in serio pericolo.

Dopo la conquista del settore ovest dell'Etiopia, il Gen. Cunningham destinato al comando della 8a Armata del Nilo lasciava il territorio dell'Africa orientale al comando del Gen. William Platt, promosso nel frattempo al grado superiore e nominato comandante responsabile della scacchiera East Africa.

La ritirata italiana sotto l'incalzare delle forze motorizzate inglesi proseguiva stancamente con gravi difficoltà per le perdite subite, la mancanza di automezzi e carburante, e l'allagamento delle piste dovute alla stagione delle piogge e solo con l'intervento di pochi aerei fu possibile rifornire con lanci di aviorifornimenti i reparti della 24a Div. Coloniale rimasta isolata nei pressi di Billate e priva di pane, zucchero, tè.

On June 21, after an agreement with the British command Jimma was evacuated and the command of the Theater moved to Debana in the area where it was started the work of reconstruction of the remaining forces of the Galla and Sidama sorely tried by months of uninterrupted fighting, counting on the presence the surviving colonial Divs. 22nd, 23rd and 26th remain in the line after the destruction of the 21st, 24th, 25th and 101st colonial divisions. The 26th Colonial Div. (Gen. U. Berardi) included among its units located throughout the Lekemti-Baco area, even an Air Force armed unit consisting of personnel from Bonaia- Lekemti- Bedelle-Gedo.

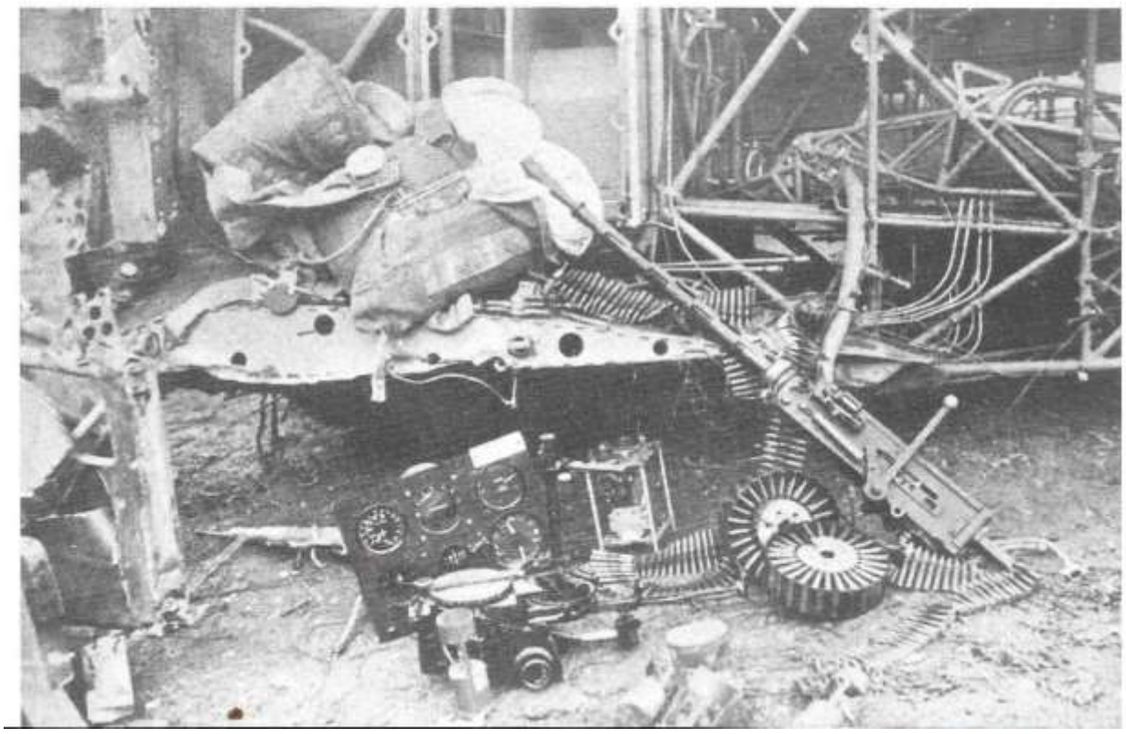
The difficult reunification of the units in the defending zone, the lack of vehicles and fuel, the difficulty wading to swollen rivers and flooded by the rains slopes, caused insulation of small garrisons that were attacked by insurgents and destroyed and in most cases was necessary to resort to the use of aircraft to supply the necessary to the survival of the principal garrisons of Iechi, Gheccia Attale and they had food and medicine dropping by air in the days between 7 and 10 May. In May, they had been lost in battle the two surviving fighters located in the area of Alomatà and by June had been burned to the ground the last CR.42 based in Jimma and consistency of E.A. aircraft was reduced to not more than a dozen bombers and fighters split between Galla and Sidama and Amara.

About 200 aircraft were lost between February and June in most for technical inefficiency and consequent destruction, many more damaged due to the enemy now undisputed master of E.A. sky.

Between the end of May and the first ten days of June the 26th Colonial Div. backed slowly toward Lekemti subjected to strong pressure from the English and the Abyssinians and irregulars, with the constant support of the RAF which bombed more shots and fired on units in retreat that the 8th had to abandon even Lekemti threatened by at, while the valiant garrison Hordes Mulè composed of 450 national and Ascari was decimated on the 14th after allowing the bulk to retreat on Bedelle.

In late June the garrison of the Galla and Sidama after heavy losses was less than 10,000 men between national and Ascari, pressed from many quarters by the British and harassed constantly by the Abyssinians rebels and deserters from the now gone colonial battalions in the pay of the enemy.[203]

The remains of a SAAF twin-engine of the shot down by anti-aircraft fire in the sky of Gondar. Col. Dario Busoni last commander of the empire airmen unit, was the soul of the resistance at Gondar



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The few garrisons remained isolated were daily subjected to air strikes and supply columns of repeatedly strafed by RAF and prone to ambush the rebels.

After splitting into two units of the General Staff R.A. E.A., Gen. Faronato operational Air Force Command had moved to the region of the Galla and Sidama at H.Q. Command of the West theater (Gen. Gazzera) together with about 30,000 between national and colonial men recovered from the garrisons of Shoa, Uasc, Hararino and partly also of Somalia.

The new headquarters command was established initially at Agaró (45 km N.W. of Jimma) where there was also the unit of Gen. Sabatini withdrawn from Somalia with a Azzurro unit placed in command of Maj. Mario Bucchi composed of personnel of the dissolved air fore command east.

This unit, then turned into the 1st Azzurro Battalion with the influx of personnel recovered, it was assigned to the tactical employment of the 101st Colonial Div. (Gen. Baccari) deployed in the vast territory between Baco-Sardulla-Soddu and Azzurro companies "D'Andria" stationed in Lekemti (command of Gen . Collalti) and "Russian" assigned to Agaró garrison but in fact tactically employed by the 26th Colonial Div..

The difficulty of communications and communications between the territories still manned by Italy, made precarious the chance to have an overall picture of the situation and communicate to Italy via the new radio.

On June 8, Gen. Faronato in a message (n. 1963/S) directed to Superaereo in the person of Gen. Pricolo, received in Rome from CRT/Guidonia and registered under number. DD/523-3/2L6, presented a picture of the military situation and E.A. aviation which could be summarized as follows:

"1) Base Azozò (Gondar) still active with a single aircraft Ca.133 efficient for combat busy supplying surrounded Govama garrisons. Taken all preparations for that eventuality situation ground troops compelled to abandonment the airport & withdraw all personnel within Gondar walls. Commander-in-place is. Lt. Col. Busoni.

2) E.A. Aeronautical Sector Command North summary from Gen. Piacentini based in Assab to restore Danakil airfields to efficiency for possible support or transit Motherland aircraft coming from the opposite Red Sea bank. An Azzurro unit oversees Eli Dahar.

3) West Sector is under the command of Gen. Collalti who has only airfield still usable in Jimma with runways 2 CR.42, 2 CR.32 and a transport unit Ca.148. [204]

Djibouti 06/10/1941 - Burn on the grounds of the airport the SM.75 I-LUNO attacked and set on fire by a P.40 of the SAAF despite clearly visible marks of the International Red Cross.

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The secret Adaro airfield because of the abundant rains is made very heavy & offers no expectations for starting bombing aircraft. It decided its disarmament & withdrawal equipment & radio direction finder as well because is today found not in perfect tranquility.

4) Lekemti Airport abandoned this afternoon 4 current. Two Azzurre companies are in position to the north at Jimma in Cossa area.

5) 1st Azzurro Battalion (Maj. Bucchi) retreating from Soddu to Orno Bottego is to be considered all prisoners with the Div. of General Caffarati.

6) The situation precipitated in the Omo Bottego area these last 24 hours past predict very dangerous & precarious situation of Jimma base. In such cases I have ordered that efficient CR.42 aircraft & Caproni Ca.148 transportation for the last transfer is always to Gondar that the base can receive them are otherwise destroyed on site with two other CR.32 unsuitable to make the long journey.

7) General Sabatini will remain at Agaró with all personnel of the Air Force Command will prepare with R. E. & E.A. troops at defense locations. Sabatini & Collalti so will follow the fate of the 2 garrisons that since this morning are in a state of emergency.

8) Excellency Gazzera ordered me to do divide the Armed Forces E.A. Command Superior and follow him with a small group people acting as my radiotelegraph station in his new headquarters that which restricts the communications I will have resumed telegraphic connection with Rome. I will give more news.

Decisions have been welcomed by all with firm and serene mood for our consciousness of having always fulfilled his duty & he never forfeited higher confidence & comrades of the other Armed Forces.

We are comforted by the thought that from a distance followed our inescapable fate & raises our hope that the inevitable final victory will allow us to return masters of the beautiful Empire sky hope that we all nourish the heart.

You I embrace dearly & express to your current serious effort the very best marks. Faronato". It was one of the last and dramatic messages that the commander sent to the E.A. Air Force to Rome before the final collapse of the west front. The final offensive in the region of the Galla and Sidama was supported by three squadrons of bombers and fighters who suffered some loses to attacks of isolated Italian aircraft and for the anti-aircraft fire.

The bombs dropped rose above 24,000 kg of explosives.

On June 10 fell as already described the capital of the region, Jimma, in whose airport were found the remains of 15 airplanes already affected or, on fire at the time of the evacuation. A Ca.148 and 2 CR.42 unscathed moved to Azozò (Gondar). The three-engine Caproni under the command of Pilot Lt. Dominic Lusardi and the crew also was carrying fighter pilots 2nd Lt. Malavolti Ildebrando and Sergeant Giuseppe Mottet of the 413th Sqd. CT while CR.42 piloted by 2nd Lt. Folcherio and Sergeant Vol.

The Ca.148 remained to Azozò until June 15 to be serviced and the same day took off for Italy with civil markings on the route Eritrea-Saudi Arabia-Egypt-Libya-Italy.

Arrived at Rome on 19 October to 4 months after starting.

Airmen of the Azzurri Battalion of Galla and Sidama greeted with regret and emotion the last Italian planes were moving further north, but still stranded forever continued to fight as humble infantry dividend with other Italian soldiers and the faithful Ascari the cheer and labors of war, in the belief which also on the ground would continue to do their duty as soldiers.

All that remained of E.A. aviation was already in Gondar and consisted of a patched up Caproni Ca.133 of Lt. Case and 3 CR.42 and CR.32 partly from Jimma and Shashamane: 5 aircraft in total!

After the loss of Galla and Sidama what still remained of the former E.A. Empire was reduced by Northern Goggiam territory circumscribed to the operating square between 12°-13° Lat. West and 37 ° -38° Long. North.

But before that the whole territory of the west theater was conquered by the enemy, the Italian soldiers continued to fight stubbornly, against all odds, materially deprived of everything need not only to live but also to fight in hostile territory, abandoned by many colonial soldiers, defectors to fear.

From June 4 to 21 in the operational division of the 26th Colonial Div. (Gen. Berardi) the garrison of Agaró the command of General B.A. Sabatini resists the attacks of the rebels and the summons to yield of Abyssinian chiefs in the pay of the British, and only after being deprived of food and water is forced to surrender to the enemy, with 240 men and 56 officers including 22 airmen.[205]

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I resti dell'ultimo caccia dell'AOI incendiato dagli aviatori italiani a Gondar prima della caduta della piazzaforte. Una eloquente immagine di tristezza che raffigura simbolicamente la morte di un mitico guerriero.

The 14th, a further communication of Gen. Faronato confirmed the capture in Assab of Generals Piacentini and Liberati, the resistance of the Agaro garrison, the departure of Ca.148 from Gondar to Jeddah and Gen. Gazzera's inspection to Gore-Lekemti for check out the possibility of using air connections with Italy local airfields.

The radio station of the E.A. Air Force Command was damaged and radio communications were done through the radio center of the H.Q. Empire Armed Forces.

Before surrendering of Agaró Gen. Sabatini telegraphed on June 21 to Gen. Faronato using the Air Force command radio station of Gondar this notice:

"Serious situation now compels me to accept now honorable surrender of the fort to British authorities after refusal days before to Abyssinian command. Provide what is can keep communications Roma & General Faronato. Consciousness in all us airmen made up last our duty & is surety of final victory our only comfort. Hard time I address you & brave comrades who still fight in the Empire sky formulating my fervent good wishes together to Air Force officers who like me for over a year supported bitter struggle sending all of you my fervent good wishes."

General Sabatini[206]

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The command of the theater moved to Bedelle then to Gore and subsequently to Bube with the technical liaison nucleus of Gen. Faronato, the 2nd Azzurro Battalion of Galla passed from the area of the 101st Colonial Div. to that of the 22nd whose command had in the meantime been taken over by Gen. Pialorsi, it moved further to the area of Dembidollo and subsequently to Belletà where on 28 June the surrender of the garrison took place, including the surviving units from Somalia, Harrar, Addis Ababa.

Lieutenant S. Ildebrando Malavolti last fallen Empire Air Force pilot on 24 October 1941 in the Gondar sky, M.O.v.m ..

On July 6, the command of the theater who had moved from Gore to Dembidollo and what was left of the E.A. Air Force G.S. is now isolated and surrounded surrendered in thr Dembidollo area. Were 276 officers, 2,360 NCOs and national troops, a thousand colonial faithful with 18 guns and 94 machine guns.

Sparse groups of surviving airmen of the "D'Andria" company inserted in the 22nd Colonial Div. surrendered on July 8 in the Gore area. On the day of July 5 after the situation had become very difficult now, negotiations were initiated by the command of the theater with the British for an honorable halt to the fighting and only the 8th day the agreement was reached with the delivery of the arms even of irregular Abyssinian units violating the truce and uncontrolled by their British officers exterminated several hundred Dubat faithful who had handed in their weapons. Gen. Gazzera with 5,000 national and 2,000 colonial surrendered with the honors of war to Gen. Gilliaert.

The defense of the Galla and Sidama region had cost the deaths of some 1,300 national and 330 missing and 7500 colonial with 2,470 missing; the wounded were a total of nearly 10,000 Italians and natives. 24% of forces assigned to the defense of the southwest arena.[207]

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The final defense of the Empire

After the surrender of General Gazzera's theater, which occurred almost simultaneously with the dissolution of the Italian garrison in Dancalia and the end of Col. Del Monte's 4th Azzurro Battalion, the extreme southern edge of the dissolved northern theater, including the region of the Amara, the Goggiam, the Uolcai, with the cities of Gondar, Debra, Marcos, Debra Tabor and the important human agglomerations of Adiscià, Mota, Metemmà, Gallabat and Azozò, remained garrisoned by the Italian Armed Forces.

The defensive garrison of the Amara sector placed under the command of Gen. Guglielmo Nasi, included about 40,000 soldiers divided into 17,000 national and 23,000 indigenous people for a total of 28 battalions, 20 batteries, 3 squadrons of cavalry, smaller units with their respective technical services, logistical, health. The Italian garrison faced for months the 1st East Africa Inf. Div. with two brigades with artillery and armored parts of means of support, 7 Battalion. self-reinforced by bands and cavalry squadrons and Sudanese camel unit, Indian, French colonial, with numerous Abyssinian Ethiopian irregular formations in direct command of the Negus Aile Selassie backed and supported by special units organized by the British to foment and lead the rebellion in Gojam, considered the most delicate and vulnerable sector in the immediate vicinity of the eastern border between Sudan and Roseires Kurmuk. Altogether about 50,000 men under the command of Gen. Cunningham.

The war in this sector had stagnated for months waiting for them to be carrying out operations in other parts of Ethiopia, knowing that the British was no longer possible for Italian commands to evade the pressure exerted by the Sudanese border, never vacate the north -west Empire gate nor could leave undefended the garrison of the region so as not to weaken the defensive system kept constantly on alert from coups at the border by enemy units and within by Ethiopians bands of marauders armed by the British, who were doing acts of sabotage, assaulted isolated vehicles and killing garrisons, plundering and causing destruction of all kinds.

It was particularly precious in those months of waiting for the aviation operations attacking the Shifta bands with bombing and strafing, supervised the transport of small contingents of soldiers from a garrison and the other where, arranged to fill with food, ammunition, medicines, weapons and equipment the remaining isolated garrisons from the attacks of the Abyssinians or by the rains in the monsoon period that caused flooding, overflowing rivers, interruptions.[208]

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An old three-engined Caproni under the Command of Lt. Case based at Azozò, had acquired a particular skill in air dropping supplies and operations on several occasions Ca.133 had been hit by rifle fire of the rebels.

The situation started to become worrying when the Amara region was affected from the east and from the south by the enemy pressure and was virtually surrounded on all sides: Sudan to the west, Eritrea to the north, south-east Shoa, Galla and Sidama south.

It was necessary as done on the west theater, reducing the territory to defend and men to better focus resources in a more rational view of the conduct operations against the enemy now rampant on all sides.

The air bases in the region included BaharDar, Azozò-Gondar, Adiscià, Danghilà, Dembeccià, but were almost entirely depleted of airplanes with the exception of a few bombers and fighters backed by some multi-engine transport which inevitably were lost for war causes and accidents.

On May 15, a CR.42 of Gondar launched a message to the rebels in Ras Sioum, to allow the passage of the wounded from the hospital field deployed outside the garrison, permission needed to prevent other massacres as occurred days before when the envoy Gen. Volpini on a mission for talks with the British in the Enda Medani area had been slaughtered by the Abyssinians.

In May, the unchallenged domination of the sky by the English manifested itself in essentially tactical function with aerial bombing and strafing of Assab, Amba Alagi, Gondar, Debra Tabor, Uolchefit, regions of Amara, Galla and Sidama. A single enemy plane is shot down in this month by automatic weapons fire stationed on Amba Alagi. He fell in the month the fortified position of Alagi with the capture of Viceroy and his staff including Gen. S.A. Pietro Pinna. It was necessary to provide for the final defense of the territory and leave undefended airbases placed outside the defensive perimeter.

The war in Amara began virtually in June 1940 clashes with the Sudanese border and lasted uninterruptedly until the end of winter 1941, with raids and fighting with rebels and Abyssinians exiles in different parts of the region also implemented with the help of the aviation.

Beginning in March 1941 was felt the first symptoms British offensive that through a seemingly disjointed strategy but clearly coordinated, first attacked north toward Cheren, then south into Giuba, then again to the northeast in Eritrea, then again from the south to the northwest towards Harrarino and Shoa, then from east to west by the British Somalia and in the region of the Galla and Sidama, before turning to the northeast on Amba Alagi, east into Danakil and south-east into Migiurtinia. A series of short but violent offensives conducted with outnumbered forces but fully motorized and with the support of aviation and armored vehicles, they had to technological superiority and armaments soon because of the value of the defenders, operating, almost always in insulation conditions, and relying on the psychological incapacity of the colonial units to effectively oppose the attacks of tanks and aerial bombings.

In this way and with deft conduct of the so-called psychological warfare, the 3/5 of the Italian E.A. Armed Forces consist of colonial Battalions part of traditional loyalty to Italy and sturdily built and largely newly formed, and Ethiopian were wavering, too easily deserting, they walked away arbitrarily from their units to return to their lands of origin and to their families that often as a tribal war followed customary in transactions of Ascari units with thousands of women and children, that burdened the movement of units and constituted a constant worry of moral and dietary concerns for commands and the men of the colonial units.

After the fall of the theaters of the north, west, east, what remained of the northern arena dismembered was represented by a large area about 400 km extending from Gubba to Beghemeder with development W.E. and high over 500 km from north to south from the Setit river in the north to the Blue Nile in Damot, now completely surrounded on all sides by enemies and troubled by unrest and sabotage inside the rebel populations.

The territory of Amara to defend was further reduced as the extension with the creation of autonomous strongholds supported on natural ramparts and comprising: Uolchefit-Debarech to the north, Passo Chercher (to the north-west), Belagir-Celgà (to the west), Dinghia-Ualag, Gorgorà (Lake Tana), Debra Tabor (south-east), Culquaber, Flercaber, Amba Ghiorghis which defended or had to defend the access from various directions to the stronghold of Gondar, the command seat of the defensive system of the Amara and the last bastion of the Empire.[209]

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Unlike the systems and not timely made and with the forethought adopted in other theaters of war put in place too late to get good results, logistics and operations, Fort Amara - unique among all those preparing in E.A. - was promptly organized to resist as long possible and to that end was suitably streamlined any impediment or moral and psychological obstacle with the premature eviction of the Asmara national civilian population took place in the spring of 1941.

Defensive field works were carried and semi-permanent, settled into the cave warehouses and stores, set up repair shops and production of weapons and ammunition, processed tractors and trucks in armored vehicles, prepared shelters protected for aircraft and MSA material, set up field hospitals and air-raid shelters, defensive positions, protected shelters for war materials and fuel, implanted radio transmitters into the cave placed to ensure communication with the motherland, a unique bond that every day still joined the fighters of E.A. with Italy. On May 15, the British began methodically the offensive against external strongholds by attacking Sudanese border eastward with infantry, armored vehicles and aircraft the advanced garrison of Celgà but even at the price of severe losses could repel enemy attacks. The garrison will remain fearless under arms and resist the enemy until November.

Almost simultaneously it started the attack at the Debra Tabor stronghold located to the west, first with the rebel formations then with British regulars units supported by the RAF, which began the offensive from May 15, they overcame the garrison resistance only on July 6, after the defection of many of the Ascari garrison intimidated by Scioane reprisals.

In June, the enemy air action suffered as already described a significant slowdown due to transfer of many flight units to Egypt for reconstitution and pass on newer models. Attacks conducted with bombers and fighters occurred in Galla and Sidama, in Amara and Assab, Gondar, Uolchefit, Debra Tabor, Celgà.

Despite the serious difficulties that exist, the Italian air force was able to operate.

Some Gondar fighters machine-gunned enemy troops around Debra Tabor and Uolchefit, felled in combat to enemy aircraft while another aircraft was destroyed by anti-aircraft fire. In the north it was then the turn of the Uolchefi stronghold, to be attacked by the Anglo-Indian formations from Eritrea, who arrived in the area at the end of April, they had been blocked by the presence of the Italian garrison in place for the protection of the roadway Asmara-Adua- Axum-Gondar.

Once again the solidity and defensive achievements of the brave garrison were thwarted by the desertions of indigenous soldiers, even though it had fought with valor between May and June against Shifta gangs and Abyssinian irregulars under the command of Ras Haialen Burru that was beating and captured in combat, but that would carry the attack and aviation bombing and prolonged strafing.

Between June and July also English units suffered losses in many battles and it was necessary to inject new units of armored vehicles and artillery to counter the initiative of the Italian soldiers.

But now the general situation of Africa Italian East had changed radically and negatively and the final fall of the Empire was to be considered irreversible and only related to time and the decisions that would take the enemy with his full initiative.

Even in the last fort of the empire, aviation would not desert the last battle to be fought by operating in the sky with the three surviving efficient aircraft were to perpetuate the continuity of aviation and ground generously in brotherhood in arms with the infantry, the artillery, the engineers, sailors and faithful Ascari, even the airmen of the Azzurra Division that fate had narrowed into one area of Gondar with all that remained of the Empire Armed Forces, had recovered, among many vicissitudes in aviation, even the survivors of the E.A. Air Force, several hundred men between officers, non-commissioned officers, graduates, specialists, airmen, skilled workers and a few hundred of colonial R.A. who had been framed into the Azzurra units with the exception of a handful of talented specialists assigned to the care and maintenance of the only 4 remaining airplanes symbolically in E.A: the, Ca.133 -MM60144 and 3 CR.42 -MM.7117/7118/4403 recovered from at least two theaters and assigned to the war and logistic services of Gondar as of August 10, 1941.[210]

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The enemy attack reduced to the defensive sector of Gondar after the abandonment of much of the region of Amara, began gradually with the offensive on the advanced stronghold of Tebra Tabor (100 km, SE, Gondar) and from the first days the few remaining aircraft and aviation infantry participated actively in the battle to Gondar – the last of the war in E.A. -which had to be prolonged for another five months. The work of those few airplanes was morally valuable enough to merit the approval of Gen. Pricolo who on July 3 sent Lt. Col. Busoni the aviation garrison commander at Gondar, the following telegram:

Tele n. 52076 - Aeronautica Gondar - Responding 0736/2.7.

"I express, dear Busoni, all my & Italy admiration for all the Azzurro airmen of the Gondar garrison's heroic behavior. In the certainty of victory I embrace you and I beg you to embrace for me all the comrades that with you hold high our honor unconquered wing -Pricolo".

The unpublished documentation found by the author on the latest E.A. Air events, starts from the month of July with a series of reports regularly to Superaereo. They arrived until it was possible to maintain links with Ethiopia. They are documents of great human and historical importance and concern the military events, operational, technical and personal airport n. 79 (Gondar-Azozò) numerous reports that for obvious practical reasons will be described taking a case among many monthly reports as a sample report.

For the month of July, the report No. 0760 / SS of July 5, 1941 described the situation in Gondar:

No 0760 / ss of prot. Gondar, 07/25/1941 -XIX

ETTO OGG: Efficiency of Gondar Air Base. THE MINISTRY OF AERONAUTICA CABINET

ROME and, for information:

THE MINISTRY OF AERONAUTICA

Staff -div. operations

ROME

To norm of this Ministry shall provide the following news and information on the air Base 79:

-SITUATION AND LOCATION:

The base is located about 18 km south of the city of Gondar in area of Azozò, fully insulated and connected to the city by road and by phone. Since the isolation in which it is located is equipped with a fence for close defense, constituted by wire and a set of fire centers manned by colonial military and units of the Army.

The Base is situated more precisely in the junction originated, from the Azozò-Gorgora track lorry and Azozò Debra-Tabor Road.

-SERVICES LOGISTICS:

All staff is housed in barracks Airport Limited and continually lives on it. The supply of food is carried out periodically at the Existence of the Army in Gondar, on the basis of "one ration" established due to the availability of the West Theater Command. To improve the supply of personnel has been called into use the land surrounding the airport with a farm which is currently already yielding.

-SERVICE OF THE MATERIAL AND FLIGHT MATERIAL:

The existing flight material is the following:

A Ca.133 -M.M. 60144

A CR.42 -M. M. 7118 with a cal machine gun. 12.7 and a cal. 7.7

a CR.42 -M.M. 4403 with two machine guns cal. 12.7

a CR.42 -M.M. 7117 partially inefficient

The Ca.133 and CR.42 M.M. 7117, submitted in the past to intense activity at the various airports on which they were located, have a relative efficiency and should be used sparingly and continuously supervised by specialized personnel meager existence. The CR.42 engine has about 300 flight hours and has been able to overcome the major defective drawback. Operation of the variable pitch propeller, using certain parts in the absence of "spare parts" have been retrieved by one of our aircraft shot down by 3-2 e.a. 5 km from the Airport.[211]

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The Ca.133 has an engine with an indeterminable number of hours of operation but certainly enormous, so much so that it was considered necessary to laterally move the two engines that give more reliance and put in the center the less reliable.

The Base has no stock of spare parts or for Ca.133 and its engines, nor for CR.42 and their engines.

Confront the needs with makeshift means and hard work even for lack of proper tools.

The Base has more of the following fuels the consumption of which is reduced to the indispensable:

- benzene eighty-seven octane approximately kg. 19,000

-Oil of castor about kg. 8,000

-Oil mineral R.A. about kg. 1,800

Also it has small amounts of gasoline and car naphtha intended for the functioning of the radio and scooters to the power plant.

All these fuels are decentralized and appropriately masked.

- ACTIVE and PASSIVE PROTECTION OF BASE:

Are located at the periphery of the base and particularly in the north, 15 Lewis machine guns in anti-aircraft position 7.7 caliber; the location is such as to ensure that in case of alarm the staff will bring you quickly and allows large areas of fire, ability to cross fires and considerable firepower.

Availability of ammunition for this type of weapon about 100,000 normal-type cartridges.

Passive protection which the base has several trenches and 2 shelters in underground cavern of sufficient capacity for the staff.

The two CR.42, inevitably, are kept open and masked with suitably housed, camouflage nets for the quick exit of the aircraft, but in appropriate places so that until now, despite frequent air raids, including aircraft enemy fighters have not been identified so far by the enemy.

The Ca.133 until some time ago kept in one of the two hangars still unharmed, camouflaged and placed so as to make it invisible even with the portals of the hangar open, was removed and masked in a special niche carved into a hill on the South-East of the field where the enemy has not yet identified, that following the strafing of the hangars made at very low altitude July 4 by a Junker 86 aircraft with French crew; in such strafing the Ca.133 suffered considerable damage which currently have been, thanks to the goodwill of the specialist staff, almost all repaired.

-STAFF:

The Base personnel is under paragraph sheet. 634 / Rp sent to Persaereo on 7th C. M.

- MORALE OF PERSONNEL:

Staff morale is high and especially you can see it from willingly and indefatigability, particularly of specialist staff, and the fearlessness demonstrated by the staff of the various specialties in service to A/A. stations during alarms.

Also it contributes to the moral elevation of the personnel with the contents of the circular animators his Exc. Nasi and sympathy that these shows for thebAir Force with the frequent visits made by the writer.

- HEALTH OF PERSONNEL:

Health personnel, maintained almost great until some time ago, has currently no overt signs of decline likely due to the increased work arising from the increased needs of the service combined with supplies necessity for war, is significantly reduced in quantity and quality. No matter what: that if venereal, the care provided by the officer with scrupulous diligence and understanding doctor, Lieutenant C.S.A. Cordisco Dr. Paslquale, are generally restorative care.

-EMPLOYMENT OF AIR TRANSPORT:

Given the paucity of the same means and the need to maintain efficiency as long as possible, their use is reduced to the minimum necessary to meet special needs of the front and, countering enemy air action on the town of Gondar; This in keeping with agreements made with his Exc. Nasi.

In particular, the Ca.133 is used to the maximum for the supply of types and materials essential to the blockaded fort Uolchefit, which is of the utmost importance to ensure the longest resistance.[212]

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The 2 CR.42 are called to intervene in support of the garrison Uolchefit (North / Northeast region of Gondar) and Sella Culquabert (Gondar South / Southeast) with machine-gun fire on the ground, should activity in an attack forces enemy that seriously threaten the existence of the garrisons themselves. For these cases there will be conventional radio telegram reports.

In addition, 2 CR.42 have the task of intervening on alert to defend the town of Gondar from enemy incursions.

For such use it is exclusive of the writer right to decide whether or not the intervention, as well as in relation to the timeliness of reports of sightings and efficiency of the means available also in relation to the type and reported enemy air forces.

All this also must be balanced with the availability of ammunition 12.7 that it is never too and whose supply is extremely difficult and uncertain.

- ENEMY AERIAL SITUATION:

Over the past 10 days, the enemy has intensified its raids on the city of Gondar and the Airport.

Incursions by the writer felt able to deduce:

1) very difficult for the enemy to reached the Gondar Base before 7 o'clock in the morning. One Blenheim from West could reach a flight skimming the Airbase at 6.55 on the 10th C. M., dropping delayed bombs near the hangars;

2) The Junkers 86 aircraft in the formation of two or three, also coming from the South or South East around 9 am, likely sourced then Addis Ababa;

3) The Blenheim aircraft come, a block or two, always from the west at approximately 8.30, presumably from Singa and Sennagr;

4) Wickers Wellesley aircraft obtained, in formation of two, three, four or five, again from North North East at 08:30 presumably from Asmara or Macallè;

5) The recent appearance of even the Hurricane, coming single or couple from East or South-East at 8 to 8:15 hours were most likely their location to Alomatà or Dessie.

It is absolutely necessary, therefore, that even possible air links with the mother country to proceed rapidly, the arrival in the sky of this airport does not happen after 5:55 hours to allow the landing at first light as it was carried out on July 7 (crew chief Peroli) and is given the continuation of the flight, without carrying out partial refill immediately and maintained unloading of transported material and in any case not later than 6:45.

The aircraft is considered essential, for prudential reasons, must follow the Gondar-Amba Alagi route; Amba Alagi-Djibouti to avoid the areas of Dessiè Alomatà.

- DOWNING OF ENEMY AIRCRAFT:

The following enemy aircraft were shot down: -a Wickers Wellesley day July 2 (Fighters Sgt. Giardina and Mottet in partnership); -a Wickers Wellesley on July 9 (Hunter Fighters Sgt. Mottet alone against formation 5 Wickers Wellesley);

-a Junkers 86 on 14 July by the anti-aircraft reaction of the Air Base (had a £10,000 reward from the South Theater Command of Gondar).

- AIRCRAFT ALLEGEDLY KILLING:

They are presumed to be enemy aircraft shot down the following:

-a Blenheim on July 9 (Fighters Sgt. Giardina);

-a Blenheim on July 10 by the anti-aircraft defense from the Air Base (went away with a fire on board).

THE CAPTAIN THE AIR BASE

Col. A.A.r.n. Pilot D. Busoni

In August and September the garrison of Uolchefit was practically isolated for interruptions and rebel attacks on food and war supplies and only the dedication of an old Ca.133 pilots taking off from Azozò with essential supplies could not keep up the morale of the stronghold defenders who on September 28 capitulated with the honors of war completely deprived of food, ammunition, medicines.[213]

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In July fell the garrison of the Galla and Sidama isolated for months and attacked from the air and from the ground and the garrison of Debra Tabor in the Amara. Bombing and strafing took place on Gondar (7 incursions), and Uolchefit Culquabert. 2 SAAF bombers were shot down by our fighters from Gondar and 2 others including one with the French crew by A/A shooting of the fortress defenses.

In four months of resistance they had fallen 374 between national and colonial, there were 576 wounded for a total of 950 men approximately 1/3 of the garrison force that had been well-93 air strikes by RAF bombing, machine gunning, strafing and the release of 5,500 aerial bombs and 14000 artillery fire. More it was not humanly possible to request the valor of the soldiers!

The commander of the Azozò airport, Lt. Col. Dario Busoni, retained his primary duty to maintain efficient the airfield at any cost to ensure links with Italy that still were insured with great dedication by the SAS and while staff try to comply with aircraft some few remaining war essential services: supply with Ca.133 of peripheral garrisons of the territory to defend -Celgà, Meleldibà, Belesa, Ifag, Fercaber, Culquabert - and fighters defending the sky and nerve center of Gondar the heart of all the defenders.

It was not possible to realize, for obvious reasons the defense of Gondar from attacks of more numerous enemy formations and accompanied by modern and better armed fighters then the Italian ones, but every effort was made to maintain the efficient Azozò airport and allow air links with Italy, now reserved only to the three-engined SM.7 5.

In July the CR.42 intervened four times to intercept flying bombers in the area, damaging some and knocking down a Wellesley Ju.86 while one was hit by anti-aircraft, giving then lost in an emergency landing.

The arrival from Italy of cal. 12.7 ammunition was very providential for the paucity of such cartridges in the area.

In August, other raids were countered by measures of Azozò fighters and the fighters, Gondar anti-aircraft and flight accidents caused the loss of 12 of Blenheim, Gladiator, Hartbest, Ju.86. The Ca.133 of Lt. Case was again damaged.

Air raids were carried out on Gondar and particularly the garrison Celgà where the bombs were directed particularly on the defensive zones followed by prolonged strafing to intimidate the colonial soldiers, try them morally and induce them to desert.

In September there were some enemy attacks thwarted by fighters and hampered by the bad weather conditions and the Ca.133 was with the commitment and sacrifice of Azozò specialists can put back into service, but the 21st of the same month the pathetic three-engine Caproni was burned by an unknown saboteur and only the 2 CR. 42 were now left to the Gondar garrison for air defense.

In September the A/A defense shot down two enemy aircraft and damaging as many. An incident that occurred in September denoted the will of the airmen not to passively suffer the humiliation of the enemy captivity.

With a stolen motor launch from the port of Massawa they managed to reach Jeddah after an adventurous escape began on September 15, many Eritrea airmen and between these Maj. Trisolini, Lts. Carlucci and Gavotti, the 2nd Lt. Rastrelli, Lely, Forchini, the Sgt. Volpe, Wells, Botto and Sgt. fitter Zellasfi plus 9 soldiers and civilians.

Between Maj. Trisolini and the new Chief of G.S. Gen. Fougier was begun at the end of 1941 a correspondence with a conventional phraseology, to implement an escape attempt by a seaplane that had to ditch in a well-specified point of the Red Sea (lat. 21° 25' 45"-Long. 39° 8' 20") then replaced with a landing in the desert region of Arabia (20 km NE of Jeddah) proposed by Commander Dominic Lusardi who had left Ethiopia with a Ca.148.

At that date they had been put back into complete efficiency the airport of Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa, Gura, Massawa used for war by the British demands.

Between July and September the British air force intensified its attacks on Gondar employing more daily incursions from 40 to 50 aircraft valiantly and vainly opposed by only two surviving fighters in the area: MM.4403 and MM.7117 that operated in conjunction with the SM. 82 arriving at Azozò coming or taking off for Libya and that ensured the connections with the motherland.[214]

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Fell the strong points of Uolchefit, the day was July 22 started the attack to that of Culquabert in S.E. of Gondar blocking the way from the south to the capital, and Debra Tabor to Ualag to the north.

After the first attempts by rebel groups who were repulsed with losses, tightened under English units with artillery and armored vehicles backed as always by bombers and fighters of the Royal Air Force based on airfields around Dessie.

The report of Col. Busoni relative to the July-August period sent to the G.S. RA resulted drafted as follows:

THE AIR MINISTRY

Cabinet

ROME and, for information:

THE AIR MINISTRY

General Staff Op.

ROME

SUBJECT: the Air Base Efficiency n. 79.

As a result of the sheet n. 0760 / SS of 7/25/41 shall provide the following information, relating to the period 25 July to 23 August, relating to Air Base no. 79:

- FLIGHT MATERIAL:

The existing flight material is the following:

A CR.42-M.M. 7118 -with a cal machine gun. 12.7 and a cal. 7.7;

A CR.42-M.M. 4403-with two machine guns cal. 12.7.

The Ca.133 M. M. 60144 was knocked out on the ground on the day 8, despite the most careful concealment, by two enemy fighters who had looked for a long while more raids.

On CR.42 M. M. 7117 has been fixed, without however changing the resistance structures do their function, a cassette that can hold about thirty kilograms of material, in order to be able to supply, to the extent possible, the garrison troops of Uolchefit-Debarek.

The base does not have the slightest of spare parts or for aircraft nor for their engine.

It makes up for the need, wherever possible, with makeshift means.

It also provides the following meager quantities of fuel:

-Benzene 87 N.O. about 15,000 kg

- castor Oil approximately 7,000 kg

- mineral Oil Approximately 1,600 kg

and very small amounts of car petrol and diesel intended for the functioning of the motors of the Radio and Electrical Central.

- ACTIVE AND PASSIVE PROTECTION OF THE BASE:

Notwithstanding the statement with the sheet which follows, in relation accentuation enemy air offense on the airport it was arranged to further decentralization of the R. T.M. Center by locating it in a shelter in the cave constructed at the foot of a hill to the northwest of the field and then used as a munitions depot.

In the same gallery it was also a part of the decentralized personnel to the aforementioned R.T.M. Center Staffed, equipped and supplied by Amara Command Troops are being built two shelters in the excavation, one to house a CR.42 and one for a bomber of type SM.79 who appears to have been asked by his Exc. Nasi. These shelters will be masked as much as possible and tend to achieve at least the protections from strafing.

On the allocation of a SM.79 informing that this unit should arrive with full crew on there being no staff on Base enabled for driving such type of aircraft and, given the frequent enemy air raids is not possible here to train, even for the limited fuel supplies.

-HEALTH OF THE PERSONNEL:

You notice a slight deterioration in the health of staff and manifest signs of physical fatigue, this largely due to the increased need together with the very low supplies.

-EMPLOYMENT OF AIR TRANSPORT:

In keeping with agreements made with his Nasi Excellency, the two CR. 42 are not employed in support the strongholds and that as a result of the meager availability of 12.7 ammunition.[215]

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It has only two fire actions for each component that has been reserved for the protection cruise on the Gondar sky by aircraft that operates the air link with the Motherland.

A CR.42 has been used to launch paper currency to the garrison of Uolchefit-Debarek.

- AERIAL ENEMY SITUATION:

In the past twenty days, the enemy has increased the aerial offense, especially over the area of Gondar and the airport, using also a great abundance of time bombs of considerable caliber. Since these incursions can be made and the following considerations:

1) Impossible or nearly by the enemy to achieve Gondar before 07:00 hours of the morning;

2) The "Blenheim" and "Wellesley" are disappearing from the action;

3) The aircraft almost always come from the East, from the South-East and perhaps from the North-East, the morning after 07.00 and even until the afternoon no later than 17 hours.

The types are: "Hawker-Hart" by three-and act sharply, "Junkers" usually in formation of two, "Farey Battle" singly or in couples, "Glosters" in pairs, "Hurricane" for the most are alone.

Likely their starting points are: Dessie-Alomatà and perhaps Macallè.

-STRATEGIC AIR LINES OF THE ENEMY AND AIRCRAFT KILLING:

During the period 25 July to 23 August the enemy has carried out various actions on the airport which can be summarized as follows:

- Fighter machine gunning n. 5;
- Bombers bombing and strafing n. 5;
- Overflights for reconnaissance n. 8.

During these incursions our air defense has always reacted very well, the proof is a "Hurricane" hit on August 5 and forced to land within our lines. A "Glosters" presented himself with other aircraft of the same type on the 15th morning hit quickly moved away, carrying fire and irregularities in the engine without the mate, who took place the altitude protection, observing.

Even though there was not any confirmation of felling, it follows' that the aircraft has reached the startinvg point because early in the afternoon of the same day a "Hurricane" and a "Fairey-Battle" flew over along the airport and adjacent to two and a half hours with the blatant object of their search for the aircraft does not come back from the morning mission.

THE CAPTAIN THE AIR BASE n. 79

Col. AA.r.n. Dario Busoni

In August, the enemy air force heavily attacked the strongholds and Gondar particularly with large-caliber bombs that caused very serious damage and many casualties. Also the airport of Azozò was hit. 4 SAAF aircraft were shot down by A/A shooting of Gondar, Culquabert and Fercaber. Our fighters machine-gunned enemy troops in the Uolchefit sector.

Also in September, the opposing air force rages on advanced fortified forts of Uolchefit, Culquabert and Celgà that were repeatedly bombed and strafed. Hit the Culquabert field hospital in Gondar and the main building of the R.C. with dead and wounded. A plane shot down by the garrison of Uolchefit that although besieged resisted undaunted. Some strafing of CR.42 in Uolchefit area against vehicles and enemy positions.

In August was disabled for strafing the Ca.133 was seriously damaged. The CR.42 M.M. 7117 was modified to air drop materials. The situation of the base of Gondar for the month of September was summarized by Col. Busoni.

Prot. N. 0864 / SS

Airport 79 on 6 September 1941 –XIX

ETTO OGG: the Air Base Efficiency n. 79 THE AIR MINISTRY

Cabinet

ROME[216]

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and, for information:

THE AIR MINISTRY

General Staff Op. ROMA

Following the 0760/SS sheet of August 23 shall communicate the following information, relating to the period August 24 to September 6, concerning the Air Base no. 79:

a) FLIGHT OF MATERIAL:

Remains the availability of two CR.42 (MM. 7117-4403).

The efficiency of the two aircraft is highly relative, as well as age of the, also engines for the absolute lack of spare parts. On CR.42 M. M. 7117 is mounted to the engine A.74 R1C 38 of M. M. 33161 which again manifested serious defects in the operation of the variable pitch propeller. The incident causes were once again ascertained and, while you try to tinker with the circumstance means that will remedy the situation only to a limited number of hours of engine operation, it was decided to request the necessary material with mes. 0859/SS of 5 C.M.

Given the absolute necessity to preserve as long as possible the efficiency of the two aircraft it is reported that the specialist staff strives ceaselessly. The aircraft enployment is limited to the indispensable with the main purpose of being able to ensure the protection of the Air Base for the air link with the Motherland. They have also been employed to supply the garrison of Uolchefit of small quantities of essential material.

b) FUEL SITUATION: still have:

Petrol 87 N.O. about 13,000 kg

Castor oil about 6,500 kg

mineral oil about 1,400 kg

and small amounts of car gasoline and naphtha intended for the functioning of the radio motor and to those of the power plant.

c) ACTIVE AND PASSIVE PROTECTION OF BASE:

Nothing substantially changed. It was suspended the construction of a shelter in the excavation for the SM.79 since it is that this airplane will not be assigned. The work already started, is continued and adapted for a shelter CR.42.

d) OF PERSONAL HEALTH:

Nothing changed about as communicated previously.

e) USE OF AIR TRANSPORT:

The two CR.42 were employed for:

n. 7 air supply to the garrison of Uolchefit; n. 1 interventions taken for the garrison of Uolchefit;

n. 1 Protection of the Air Base upon the arrival of the SM.75.

f) ENEMY AIR SITUATION:

In this period the enemy has significantly slowed down its activities on the Gondar sky, Azozò and of the Air Base. During the reporting period the origin of enemy planes, as in the past, it is always from the South-East and East. It was noted, however, that a Hurricane aircraft on September 3, the day could reach the sky of the Base at 6.45 am (local time).

g) AIR ACTIONS OF ENEMY AND AIRCRAFT KILLING:

During the period under review, the enemy actions carried on the airport are summarized as follows:

Strafing fighter: n. 1; Bombing and strafing of the bombers: n. 2;

Overflights for reconnaissance: n. 5.

During these raids the air defense of the airport has reacted very well only when the aircraft is: kept in proportion useful for the shot.

h) NEED OF MATERIALS:

Being aware that the general needs of fort Gondar in the loads that will come to her from the Mother Country, can not be understood that a small part of material for this base, there have been requests very limited with the following Mcg:[217]

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- to Gabaereo for Seraereo-Mcg. n. 0841/ss of 29 August: request of 7.7 ga. and n. 6 chamois leathers;

- to Gabaereo for Teleletaereo- Mcg. 742/M of 28 August: urgent request no. 10 battery anode 60 Volte;

- to Gabeaereo for Sanaereo- Mcg. above named: an elastic belt wearing out;

- to Gabaereo for Seraereo- 4 Mcg. 0859/SS of September 5: essential material for reconditioning of CR.42 currently inefficient;

-a Gabaereo for Seraereo- Mcg. n. 732/M of August 24: request No. 6 barrels for Lewis machine gun cal. 7.7.

It is hoped that the above material comes with the first means possible.

THE CAPTAIN THE AIR BASE

Col. A.A. r.n. Pil. D. Busoni

In September, Col. Busoni prepared a new Technical report on the state of use of aircraft as well represented:

Prot. N. 0885 / SS

Airport 79, September 10, 1941 XIX

THE MINISTRY –Gabinetto

ROME Uff. STATE SENIOR DIRECTOR AIR FORCE

ROME THE AIR MINISTRY Technical Inspectorate of the material

ROME SUBJECT: Efficiency Gondar aircraft.

The two CR.42 -the Base have now a number of hours of flight certainly very high. It also applies to the two motors. In particular: 1) The engine A.74 R.1 C.38 serial number 33161 mounted on C.R.42.M.M.7117 presented on July 2, 1941 the following problem:

"As soon as the [oil temperature exceeded 95° -100°, a common occurrence in E.A., the propeller did not keep the adjusted pitch position (2,200-2,300 rpm) but it automatically passed to maximum pitch resulting in decreased 600- 700 rpm and decrease of power and therefore of the possibilities and flight characteristics."

After several tests and verifications at various parts propeller constant speed and pressure regulator it has been able to ascertain the existence -of metal residues interposed between the annular collector rings components that deliver oil to the propeller hub and back to the collector. Thus it is producing a glimpse of oil-not visible from the outside - and a consequent fall of decisive pressure: the inability to bring the propeller in the minimum pitch position if the defect manifested itself in the front manifold; an excessive slowness in the change of step or in the return on the maximum pitch position if the oil escaped manifested itself in the rear header.

During the dismantling of the sealing rings it has also encountered a front excessive attrition of some of those made of cast iron, while those of bronze were perfectly unaffected.

The mentioned drawback has been eliminated by replacing worn parts with similar parts, carefully checked, recovered from the wreckage of a CR.42 motor shot down in combat Feb. 3, 1941.

This recovery has caused considerable efforts and patient work and tiring also because of the lack of special tools for engine A.74 R.1C.38.

However to work completed on CR.42 is still efficient outcome and could make a further activity of approximately 13 hours.

The day September 4, 1941 the inconvenience occurred again and the already acquired experience if they have been able to identify the cause. The repair was carried out with the replacement of worn parts with the same number, the latest available, by the aforementioned CR.42 of recovery.

It is believed that the motor can still have to make, in such conditions, a maximum of 10 flight hours that can be increased if you reach the required material with MCG. 0859/SS of 5 weeks. 41 & specified further by MCG. 0872 / SS of September 9, 1941.

1) The motor A.74 R.1 C.38 MM 21023 mounted on the aircraft C.R.42 M.M. 4403 was also notable activity and it did not submit even severe irregularities which were probably not too late to show analogs or other drawbacks.

3) The two aircraft also for continuous exposure to the elements would benefit from repainting. [218]

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Were performed always to perfection, struggling with all kinds of difficulties, all the damage problems caused by bombing and enemy strafing.

The behavior in flight of the aircraft is still good, but they no longer handling and command obedience of the past by presenting the characteristic defects of antiquated aircraft (tendency to pitch up or beat, slope on one side, etc.).

I recommend by name the personnel of the specialized body responsible for maintenance and efficiency:

1st Airman Motorist Rossetto Ippolito
1st Airman Motorist Bozzani Pasquale
1st Airman Motorist Paradiso Angelo
1st Airman Fitter Casagrande Aldo
1st Airman Armorer Egini Alfredo that struggling with adversity and deficiency of all kinds, working with loving patience and at no time has ensured the almost constant efficiency of the same aircraft.

4) The Ca.133 registration 60144 on which are mounted P.7 C.16 engines (left MM 14992, Central MM 15128, Right MM13362) as it is known strafed several times and again miraculously back in efficiency, on August 8, 1941, its concealment discovered was strafed by a Glosters and a Hurricane.

The damage is very serious because, among other things have been seriously compromised by many explosive projectiles the in flight supporting structures of the wings and fuselage. In aircraft regardless of engines and tanks and instruments, over 350 holes have been counted many of them rips. Lack of materials, a variety of media, equipment, specialized for special repairs, and a technician, make it almost impossible to put back into the aircraft's efficiency in any area of operation would have been put out of action by a piece also due to age.

Currently it does all that is humanly possible to make efficient the airplane on which, however, is not given to ascertain what are the limits of safety repair completed hoping, as long as this new enemy air raids do not damage the aircraft again that inevitably must It is kept in the hangar already repeatedly hit by enemy strafing and bombing. The following specified personnel working patiently and tenaciously around the aircraft without observing times whatsoever and without fatigue limits.

Sergeant Engineer 3rd Cl. Boschian Gino
Sergeant Engineer Luigi Lazzaro
1st Airman Motorist Impiduglia Giovanni
1st Airman Motorist Avogadri Angelo
1st Airman Motorist Dellocchio Luigi
1st Airman Motorist Saterino Emidio
1st Airman Fitter Rosini Ugo
1st Airman Fitter Chiappetta Lorenzo

It will be posted when the airplane will be afforded an opportunity to fly, but not hiding the unknowns that have engines. These due for wear to long operation does not give excessive reliance. The engine that provides less assurance has been placed at the center.

5) Both aircraft C.R.42 and Ca.133 and related engines it does not have the Identity booklets long gone lost on the various operational theaters of the E.A.

So it was considered having to make public, because they can be fairly evaluated the conditions in which it operates, the surviving aircraft of Gondar, the spirit of sacrifice and dedication of all staff, the dark and quiet courage of those who fly in conditions of impaired material efficiency, and the difficulties that are daily faced and overcome (not always the local environment) in order to cause even a substantial contribution to the strength of Gondar.

THE CAPTAIN THE AIR BASE
Col. A.A.r .n. Pilot. D. Busoni

On September 14, another report of Col. Busoni, a document of great historical and human interest describing war and personal aspects of the men of E.A. aviation now completely isolated from the Motherland.

Prot. N. 0891 / SS
Airport 79, September 14, 1941 -XIX
OBJECT: the Air Base Efficiency n. 79.
THE MINISTER AIR
Cabinet
ROME and, for information:
THE AIR MINISTRY
General Staff Op.
ROME

Following the 0864/SS sheet of 6 September 1941 disclose the following information relating to the period September 7 -14 in September, about the efficiency of the Air Base no. 79.[219]

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a) FLIGHT MATERIAL:

Nothing to add to as communicated with the 0885/SS sheet of September 10 to the object: Efficiency Gondar aircraft.

b) FUEL SITUATION:

Already it has:

Petrol 87 N.O. about 11,500 kg

Castor oil about 6,500 kg

mineral oil about 1,400 kg

as always, also in the consumption of fuel is made the strictest economy.

c) ACTIVE AND PASSIVE PROTECTION OF THE BASE:

Nothing substantially changed in the active protection. It has devised the system to detonate a bomb of 31 kilograms, buried in the immediate vicinity of special decoy for enemy fighter aircraft, controlled by hand with remote pull in the event that enemy aircraft spread down to strafe the decoy consists of a dummy intent to propel a barrel trolley. The bomb, which was created a special punched, must play its main effect upwards throwing abundant rubble. The safety regulations have been observed for the staff. The bomb is equipped with a fuse at the last moment, and is easily disarmed if no use is made of it.

In passive protection signals the completion of a shelter for CR.42 (masking and defended by machine-gun fire almost total).

It is under construction another similar shelter to the Ca.133 aircraft (suitable for S.79 and CR.42 4) having the same masking and protection features.

d) HEALTH OF PERSONAL:

Staff health undergoes ups and downs, it is believed also because of seasonal change that has influence on physical already a bit debilitated. All the officers, who are few in number, were more or less affected.

Captain A.A.r .s. Alberto Lombardi for widespread bronchial tube and wasting away;

Lieutenant pilot Malavolti Ildebrando rhinotracheitis for bronchitis and sinusitis front left.

All staff have undergone the smallpox vaccination and later the typhoid. As a precaution will also be made to the prescribed antidermotifica vaccination whether there will be availability of vaccine (required with Mcg. 0880 / SS of date September 11) having occurred in the area of sporadic cases of typhus.

e) USE OF AIR TRANSPORT:

The two CR.42 were employed for:

No. 6 air supply to Uolchefit garrison; No. 1 starting on a protection alarm S.75 aircraft in flight and then came September 8; result unfounded alarm.

Following the criterion to save as much as possible the two aircraft please retain as much of the efficiency that still demonstrate, for matters of greater importance.

f) SITUATION OF ENEMY AIR:

Nothing substantially changed. They have reappeared Wickers-Wellesley bombers It is assumed are partly located on Alomatà and Dessie airfields.

g) ENEMY AIR ACTIONS:

During the reporting period the enemy has carried on the airport the following actions: Strafing fighter: n. 6; Bombing and strafing of bombers: n. 1;

Overflights for reconnaissance: n. 1.

h) MATERIALS NEEDED:

The material demands made until now have been reduced to a minimum balancing them also to material requests made by the Theater Command and were submitted to his Excellence Nasi.

THE CAPTAIN THE AIR BASE

Col. A.A.r .n. Pil. D. Busoni[220]

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On September 18, Col. Busoni sent an interesting report illustrating how and what materials it was possible to repair the decrepit Ca.133 which was a symbol of the Italian aviators of Gondar will to resist above all moral and material difficulties. The Ca.133 had been repaired on September 16 with the strange and ingenious systems and with heterogeneous materials of luck and had supplied Uolchefit for 5 times in September air dropping 35 q.li of materials. Another Ca.133 had been destroyed on 8 August.

The technical report despite its descriptive brevity, assumes a high human aspect and demonstrates how the airmen enthusiasm of Gondar had dedicated with love and skill to re-commission “at any cost," the old man vented trimotore unconsciously become the symbol of will of a handful of the Blue men of the Air Force.

No 0899/ss of prot.

Date September 18, 1941 SUBJECT: Repair and efficiency Ca. 133 MM 60144

THE MINISTRY OF R. Air Force.

Cabinet

ROME AT THE MINISTRY OF R. Air Force. Technical Inspectorate of the material

ROME AT THE MINISTRY OF R. Air Force. Office Staff

ROME

It follows on from what was communicated with page no. 0885 / SS of 10 September about Ca.133 MM 60144.

The said device, already decrepit for peace activities and the first turning on the various E.A. war fronts, had already undergone various repairs and presents very clearly the decay due to 14 months of exposure to the elements due to the decentralization and concealment on the various airfields of operation. Such decay traces are particularly noticeable on the part of the linenized and wood.

After being repeatedly strafed the airfield of Gondar, and have been called into efficiency, 08/08/1941 day, after again strafing underwent the following major damage that made it f.u.:

1) *Fuel tanks*: front with 5 hole, back with 3 holes.

Repairs for welding difficulties that offered no guarantee for the experience of the past, were performed at the Workshop of the Army Corps of Engineers. 4 reservoirs one burst, one was not well fixed two were repaired.

2) *Of the transverse strut Break top of the central engine mount*:

Conceived and performed the repair at the airport was completed welding Workshop of the Army Corps of Engineers but first welding - lacking suitable specialized -is found to partly burned

3) *To the fuselage*:

a) hole to hole right upper spar between the 9th and 10th orderly;

b) hole in the upper left spar rift between the seventh and eighth orderly;

c) hole in the right front spar rift between the ninth and tenth ordered;

d) Through hole left pipe of additional spar ordered to 10th;

e) Hole to hole the cross tube between the 10th and ordered the tail box;

f) court ordered to tear the tube 6a;

g) Through Hole ordered to higher teacher tube;

h) Hole to hole the first sorted the right side;

i) Truncation of the cross tube between the first orderly 2a.

4) *For the rudders*:

a) Tear the main tube and rudder;

b) Tear at the main gate of the tailplane.

5) *the Wings*:

a) Rift spar the front right wing of the 8th 10th 12th rib.

b) Gash to spar left front wing, up to the 18th and 20th rib;

c) truncated ribs 5 in the two wings.

6) *Control Cables*:

a) direction, the depth of ailerons truncated at various points;[221]

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b) 6 castors for commands removed or broken;
c) 2 holes glimpse at the depth of the steering idler arm;
d) of the crank shaft 5 through holes of depth rudder control.
7) *Landing Gear*:
Puncture elastic force extenders of the left leg.
8) Tools:
Damage to the various aerodynamic outlets, and instruments.
9) Miscellaneous:
deep dents in the sail of various power structures.
10) Propellers:
Dents.

All repairs to the fuselage structures were made using sleeves and prisoners (soldered) with recycled material from old aircraft burned about 22 km from the airport (Secret Field K. 22).

The pieces mentioned in n. 6 letters c) and d) they have been replaced with the same number recovered by the aforementioned aircraft, and therefore of questionable because resistance annealed. The control cables have been replaced, in part repaired with splicing for lack of new cable.

The removed or damaged pulleys were replaced with the same number of recovery by the aforementioned aircraft and reassembled accurately.

The main tube of the rudder and depth were repaired with sleeves and soldered studs.

The wings spar and ribs were reinforced with careful work with wood of an old existing wing at the Airport.

It adds that the welding carried out to the engine mount was not carried out by a specialist of such welds and appears partially burnt.

all part of the aircraft linen paper was patched with recycled towels and linen received recently from the Motherland, also, these being insufficient for all repairs, it is drawn from the market with various fabric types.

It was also reactivated the electrical system of the aircraft with electrical conductors of various types increased for the absence of such material.

For transactions paste is providential come, glue sent recently by the Motherland.

With regard to the on-board instrumentation it has been able to repair, damage with replacement of pipes and tools.

As refers to the motor, the work is limited to the replacement of a carburetor and some spark plugs and some electrical power cables.

The dent propellers itself from bullets have not been repaired. Their operation does not appear affected.

So we wanted to make known to raise awareness of the difficulties encountered in the work, and to report that the work done-not at first because of the severity of the damage, the age of the material and the lack of suitable material-not give any hope of successful and above all safety.

The will be able to bring to the garrison of Uolchefit aid supplies and caused him - this writer to attempt repairs also with recycled material and annealed (retrieved 22 km away by treacherous area) and with hopes that new enemy raids not They do cause further damage to the work started.

To instill confidence to the few pilots and take responsibility of flights with a highly relative efficiency of aircraft and doubt the safety factor, the no-load test and load of 6 tons was carried out by the writer with Lieutenant Pilot Case, Giovanni.

The experiment was successful.

The aircraft shows defects control characteristic of aircraft with long use, and a certain hardness in the commands.

Can go.

It is so that to date have been made to the garrison of Uolchefit 5 supplies of 6-7 quintals per time.

I believe that the reasons aforementioned are sufficient to justify the responsibility that the writer to employ and with flying an aircraft in such conditions.

THE COMMANDER OF THE AIR BASE
Colonel A.A.r .n. D. Busoni

On September 21, in a heartfelt and urgent telegram sent confidentially to the Chief of Staff of the Royal Air Force, General Pricolo, Col. Busoni communicated the destruction of the Ca.133 by sabotage: «Glorious old Ca.133 destroyed by fire at night on the 21st.[222]

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I do not know the causes, that I seek, but I suppose act of sabotage enemy emissary, made short-range surveillance patrol. My soul bitter. Col. Busoni. "

On September 26 with a confidential telegram to Gen. Pricolo n. 3515/SS, Col. Busoni put to the current Chief of Staff on the investigation carried out to identify the culprit of the sabotage that caused the destruction of Ca.133, embittering and demoralizing all of Gondar airmen, guilty that he deserved to be identified and severely affected by the laws of war.

At the end of September Col. Busoni he communicated to Superaereo what had promised the pilots of Gondar in the hypothesis that the fortress should fall a day to enemy attack. A document showing the will and the decision of the Italian aviators to fight bravely to the end.

Airport 79, September 27, 1941 -XIX
TELEAVIO LEAVING
GABAEREO
ROME

0918/SS. *For Superaereo*. In the event that Gondar should one day fall, Second Lieutenant Pilot Malavolti Ildebrando and Marshal Pilot Mottet Giuseppe have volunteered to carry out one of the following missions with the two surviving CR.42 aircraft:

1) Check out from Gondar and ground attack by surprise the enemy aircraft and existing fields on Asmara and Gura and then abandonment of aircraft and parachute.

2) Departure from Gondar to surprise and attack enemy aircraft on the ground of the existing field Alomatà and then continue the flight to Djibouti. In this way, the brave-fiercely the Air Force E.A. would close its business.

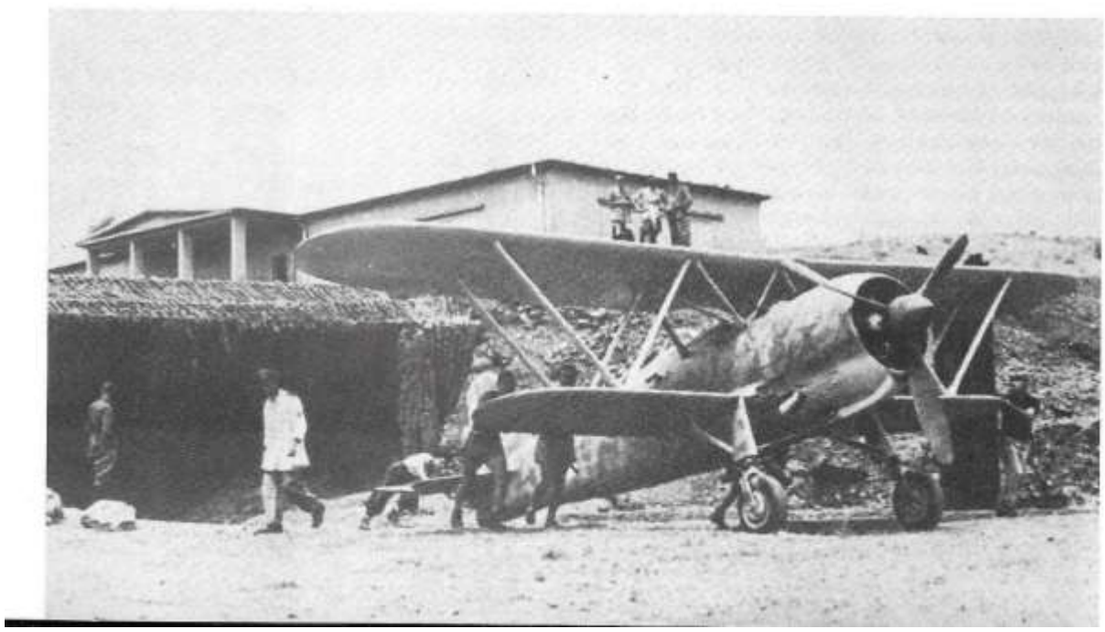
The mission referred to in No 2 would be carried out provided that Djibouti was able to last the British blockade and for the pilots there was a possibility of a subsequent repatriation.

It would like in this respect the clearance this Superaereo.

The aforementioned missions, however, will be submitted to me in advance to his Exc. Nasi Commander of the theater at the appropriate time will determine whether they are feasible in relation to the situation and circumstances of the moment.

Colonel Busoni[223]

22 November 1941- The last surviving empire airplane of the Air Force, the CR.42 MM. 4403 is pushed out of its hanger to refuel for her last war mission piloted by the brave Sergeant Giuseppe Mollet. (Collection A. Vigna).



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To meet the military ambitions and Aile Selassie policies aimed at a more massive participation of his men against the Italians, the Abyssinians rebels was assigned the task of hindering and blocking supplies from Gondar to Culquabert-Fercaber hence take as happened to the Uolchefit garrison by hunger, and this situation imposed vigorous policing measures between Gondar-Culquabert and Fercaber road to clean up the rebels from the areas Gorgora, Belesa and Ambaciara so that make more secure communications and reinforce materially and morally advanced strongholds.

In October stopped the rainy season and the enemy activity was increasing in intensity manifesting itself in different areas of Fort Amara further reduced by enemy pressure and more logical defensive measures.

In September the CR.42 equipped with a small container for materials carried 6 air drop missions to the garrison of Uolchefit launching kg. 107 between ammunition and medicines. Between July and October 9 were carried also escort after the arrival from Italy of SM.75 aim to deliver to Gondar.

The two CR.42 remained at Gondar gave in October vivid signs of strafing enemy vehicles activities on the roadway to Debra Tabor, Dabat and Abba Fog.

The SAAF aircraft bombed many times Gondar, Celgà, Culquabert, Ualag losing three aircraft for anti-aircraft fire, by automatic weapons of the brave garrisons tight siege in the grip and hammered daily by guns and aircraft.

Information received from the French to the British Somalia signaled that the Italian three-engined connecting to Gondar with the Motherland made a technical stop in Djibouti, and this finding was considered sufficient to detach Curtiss “Mohawk” fighters of the 3rd Sqdn. SAAF on the airport of Adiscià (70 km east of Gondar) on the line joining Giibuti-Socota-Gondar. On October 12, a Curtiss sighted a stopped trimotore on the French airport and machine-gunned it on fire despite the SM.75 was protected by international marks of the Red Cross.

In October, in less than three months the bombing of Gondar had resulted in the release of about 50 tons of explosives and 100,000 rounds of machine gun fired at the defenses and the men who defended the fortress.

On October 15, with radiogram n. 0918/SS Lieut. Col. Busoni warned the G.S.A of the intention expressed by the CR.42 - pilots 2nd Lt. Malavolti and Stg. Mottet -to run the latest E.A. aviation mission attacking by surprise the airfields of Asmara and Gura or alternatively to Alomatà then continue flying to Djibouti to be interned.

The death of 2nd Lt. Malavolti was reported in Rome with radio n. 0983 and modified as set forth above. There remained now only one CR. 42 to represent the Italian air force on the battlefield of East African war.

The last report received in Rome from the Air Force Commander in Gondar, was completed on October 15 and contained the situation that day on the air base n. 79.

Prot. N. 0914/SS
Airport 79, it October 15, 1941 - XIX
OBJECT: the Air Base Efficiency n. 79.
THE MINISTRY OF AIR FORCE
Cabinet
ROME and, for information:
THE AIR MINISTRY
General Staff Op.
ROME

As a result, the sheets n. 0885/88, 0891/88 and 0901/88 respectively on 10-04-18 September, disclose the following information relating to the period 14 September to 14 October 1941 regarding the efficiency of the Air Base no. 79.

a) -MATERIAL FLIGHT:

As regards the two CR.42 nothing particular to add to what already disclosed with the sheet 0885/SS of 10 September. The two aircraft were again repainted by spraying with the paint to the nitro-cellulose received with air link of 19 September.

With regard to Ca.133 - announces that strafed the day on September 19 on the ground, within the protection built in the hangar (awaiting admission to the Airport was completed excavation) from a “Hurricane” aircraft now again under repair (particularly serious injuries to his left wing rear spar left).[224]

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The night on September 21, as communicated with mcg. 0910/SS was destroyed by fire at the hands of unknown sabotage.

b) -Situation FUELS:

Already have:

Petrol 87 N.O. about kg. 7,500;

Castor oil about kg. 3,000;

mineral oil R.A. about kg. 900;

They were transferred to Troop Command 1,500 kg. castor oil by saponification. Always applies the strictest economy of fuel that can be said they are the only ones in the reduced area of Gondar. In this regard it would be useful if the crews of air link coming, while maintaining the safety margin needed for the continuation of the flight to Djibouti, could, given the chance, leave a part of their fuel.

c) - ACTIVE AND PASSIVE PROTECTION OF THE BASE:

Nothing special to report. The shelter plan for the Ca.133 was suspended in reliance of the destruction of the aircraft and has been used for one of the two C.R.42. For this aircraft was completed.

d) –HEALTH OF PERSONNEL:

Nothing particularly varied in general. Captain Alberto Lombardi and 2nd Lt. Malavolti Ildebrando recovered.

It is being carried out with Antidermotifica vaccination vaccine arrived with air link of 19 September.

e) -EMPLOYMENT OF AIR TRANSPORT:

The two C.R.42 were employed for:

n. 3 air supply of the garrison of Uolchefit and n. 1 reconnaissance in North and South Gondar.

The Ca.133 was employed for:

n. 5 air supply of the garrison Uolchefit.

f) - ENEMY AERIAL SITUATION:

Unmatched enemy aircraft that flew over this period to fort Gondar are Wellesley in formation of four, rarely five, a Hurricane, two Junker and two Hawker. Their raids have been very limited. They are no longer appeared the Glosters. They come and always away from the East and Northeast.

g) - ENEMY AIR ACTIONS:

During the reporting period the enemy has carried on the airport the following actions: fighter strafing: n. 1;

Bombing and strafing of the bombers: n. 2;

Overflights for reconnaissance: n. 1.

h) -Various:

It was intensified the Airport Security Service, and for the 2 CR42 who are hospitalized and hidden in populated area, was established, despite the scarcity of personnel from the various services, a regular on-call, with national staff from what is made available with the destruction of Ca.133.

THE CAPTAIN THE AIR BASE

Col. A.A.r.n. Pilot. D. Busoni

THE LAST BATTLE IN E.A.

October 24, died during on a mission 2nd Lt. Malavolti surprised by a Gladiator and attacked from behind before he could defend himself while being in obvious inferiority, but repeatedly hit by several blasts fell without control further south of Adiscià, where the CR .42 burned on impact with the ground. The death of the young brave officer was commemorated with a message of the same enemy who threw a message on Azozò: "Honor to the Fiat pilot. He was a brave man. South African Air Force."

The glorious death of 2nd Lt. Ildebrando Malavolti was announced in Rome by Col. Busoni with Tele n. 0983 of 25 October as follows: “Enemy aircraft this morning launched on our positions following message: a tribute to the Fiat pilot. He was a valiant South African Air Force. Predicted does not seem to leave no doubt about the brave Lieutenant Malavolti whose heroism was recognized by opponents and whose mood is alive in all comrades memory.[225]

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It is probable the brave officer has strafed British vehicles of the enemy airfield halfway between Adi Arcai and Tacazzlè. Commander Gondar. "

To the memory of 2nd Lt. Ildebrando Malavolti pilot of the 413th Sqd. Autonomous CT was granted M.O.v.m., with a motivation that honored the sacrifice of the young pilot of all E.A. aviators.

In November the British positioning for the attack on Culquabert could be considered completed with the presence of a whole Motorised Brigade reinforced by three infantry battalions with units of "I" tanks, artillery, engineers, services and a mass of irregular Abyssinian evaluated around to 30-40,000 men minimally controlled by the British, but with the bulk of the men commanded by manager leaders of Shoa, Gojam and the Amara; other English units were reported in front of the garrisons of Celgà, Ualag and Dinghià.

The attack began on November 12 against Culquabert with violent artillery fire and air strikes, and the next day were manifested the first infantry assaults including units of our former Colonial Battalion who had deserted en masse and that they hoped to get from Haile Selassi is after eloquent evidence of loyalty and submission forgiveness for themselves and their families still in the nightmare of tribal reprisals of the Scioani.

The strongpoint was tenaciously defended inch by inch by CC.NN., Zaptieh Carabinieri and Askari loyal to Italy and five days later the attack could be considered repulsed with heavy losses on both sides.

The final attack on Gondar launched in November invested with repeated aerial bombing and strafing the advanced strongholds of Culquabert and Fercaber finally forced to surrender. Three enemy planes were shot down by automatic weapons at Ualag and Cullquabert where was captured a pilot captain of the SAAF who jumped with a parachute. Strafed the field hospice of Culquabert with dead and wounded.

November 10, the last enemy airplane was shot down of the long campaign of the E.A. war - a Curtiss "Mohawk" to be exact of the 3rd Sqdn. SAAF hit by machine gun fire in the Culquabert area. On November 22 was also recorded for history the last Italian aviation offensive mission with CR. 42 of Sgt. Mottet who machine-gunned enemy positions south of Azozò and then Culquabert where was killed the commander of the enemy artillery. The other Dinghià strongholds had been evacuated to reinforce the garrison of Chercher Pass; that of Dirma Pass besieged had succumbed to hunger and thirst and Celgà was now completely isolated and Gondar was under daily heavy air attacks.

On November 20, the British resumed attacks against Culquabert employing fifty bombers and fighter-bombers in harmony with the fire of the guns chattered incessantly defensive positions until the time of the assault which lasted with ups and downs until the 21st when the valiant garrison, attacked from many sides, yielded to the enemy preponderance. The same day fell the Fercaber stronghold pressed closely by overwhelming forces. Died in two days of fighting 159 national and 354 colonial while 412 were wounded and 80 missing: was lost over 40% of the overall strength of the two strongholds!

THE LAST DAYS OF THE AVIATORS OF GONDAR

In the month of September with the reunification of the whole aviation personnel recovered in Gojam, it was incorporated for the 22nd Azzurra Brigade under the command Lt. Col. Dario Busoni, who came out in defense of the Uolchefit - Gondar road in the vicinity of 150 km. to Dabat.

The Brigade had a force of 3,336 men, divided as follows:

officers No. 71;

NCO: n0. 136;

Graduates, specialists and airmen n. 1,570;

Colonial R.A. n. 1,559.

From 15 September the 22nd Azzurra Brigade had the following, loss:

Deaths: national no. 13 - colonials n. 62

Wounded national n. 47 - colonials n. 241

Deserters: National No. 8 - colonials n. 68

The positions were repeatedly bombed and strafed by British planes also attacked with 4 Ju.86 escorted by Hurricane on 3 September the Azozò airport, damaging a CR.42 hit by a stone projected by the explosion.[226]

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On September 18 the air base n. 79 (Azozò of Gondar) under the command of Maj. Corti Umberto still had 8,500 kg. gasoline N.O. 87, 6.500 kg of castor oil and. 1,400 kg. of mineral oil. In October the 22nd Azzurra Brigade was alternated and assigned to the defense of the airport perimeter of Azozò, placing at the edge of the field several gun emplacements with SAFAT and Lewis machine guns retrieved from planes bombed or accidents.

The main attack in Gondar could progress slowly shrinking from many directions the defensive perimeter.

November 21, Col. Busoni communicated via radio to Superaereo: "Cerc'herò communicate our fate and our fall with words: "Long live Italy" until now surviving airmen Gondar greet comrades fiercely hoping for them to fame and fortune & our homeland triumph arms and justice.

Commander Gondar"

The continued fighting increasingly hard and bloody and the 22nd in response to the telegram of Col. Busoni was received the following message by the Chief of Staff/RA Gen. Fougier:

“Aeronautics” Gondar 01022 -92324 reference 21st current –it is with you & will always be with soul & gratitude of the country. Do your duty to the last, as always in Italy's name & its air force - Fougier. "

On 22 November, a few hours before the Col. Busoni sent his message to Rome, Sgt. Giuseppe Mottet pilot took the last CR.42 of Gondar on the enemy strafing until the last bullet the English positions at Culquabert and this action concluded after 511 days of asymmetrical war and hopeless the E.A. war of the Italian aviation activities.

The 24th news posts in Rome, Aviation Commander Gondar made of short, dramatic words: "enemy offensive action with 15 units at intervals - Col. Busoni."

Fallen one after the other peripheral strongholds, the defense of Gondar remained entrusted to advanced principals of Ualag and Chercher, Azozò and Magach no longer able to rely on the besieged garrison of Celgà, now placed outside the defensive perimeter of Gondar.

24/11/41 -Telegramma n. 128 889/OP 06:30 From Gen. Nasi to the Supreme Command - Rome "Today 23rd afternoon enemy artillery began to pound the airport. *Stop*. In these landing conditions at Gondar no longer advisable given the overall situation. *Stop*. It renounces supplies possibilities except funds necessary to pay Ascari examining possibilities launch packages of bank notes & Djibouti route continuation ticket. *Stop*. Launch is expected to take place in the morning hours 03:45 hours local to 06:10 with one pass of the field from the north to the south ie reverse normal landing. *Stop*. Sum needed 100 million in 1000 bills & 30 million various sizes.

Stop. Sgn. NASI

On November 24, Gen. Nasi could still count on about 9 national and colonial Battalions, 8 artillery batteries, 2 co. heavy mortars, a battery A.A. 20 mm, a group of cavalry, bulk service units for a total of 6,500 men, 70 cannons, 48 mortars 81 mm, 6 machine guns 20 mm. The entrenched camp had a development of about 250 km.

Italian forces opposed to the British deployed 4 infantry brigades reinforced by 4 Battalions a mixture of Scottish, French, Ethiopian, Sudanese and also units of tanks, artillery, engineering, signals, healthcare and logistics services with the support of about 30,000 irregular Abyssinian controlled part of British officers and local leaders as part of Degiac, Desmagiac, Fitaurari from various parts of Ethiopia: Ermacciò, Cheranti, Gogglam, etc.

The RAF took part with about a hundred planes divided in 7 squadrons of bombers and fighters.

The preliminary attack began on November 24 with exploratory pushes intended to test the Italian defensive posture and conducted by tanks and armored vehicles with mobile batteries from 88/27 who acted on Magach River, Abbaraghei, Meleldibà, Azozò. The RAF put under their inspection continuing among other attacks against Gondar and peripherals defensive positions. The decisive attack in Gondar after the loss the garrisons of Uolchefit, Debra Tabor, Celgà, Culquabert and Fercaber was planned with the support of about 60 aircraft of the SAAF between bombers and fighters belonging to the squadrons 3rd, 41st and 47th that performed about a hundred missions on peripheral garrisons launching 8,500 kg of bombs and firing 16,500 rounds of machine guns. 5 aircraft were lost due to a series of accidents caused by damage during offensive missions.[227]

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Between 23 and 27 November the enemy aviation release Approximately 12,000 kg of bombs on the Gondar firing positions about 12,000 bullets on defenders, on stations, on vehicles of the stronghold.

On 26 November the, specialists staff to treat CR.42 the valiant Sgt. Mottet, asked and obtained permission from Col. Busoni not to leave intact the plane to the enemy and the 5th Azzurro Battalion on the airport fights his last battle for the honor of the Italian Air Force and arms.

On day 26, by which time the enemy vanguard had arrived just a few km from Azozò from Chercher, the airmen of Gondar sprinkled petrol 9on the glorious Fiat CR.42 MM. 4403 and burned it so as not to leave it in the hands of the enemy. Few men including the valiant Sgt. Mottet, assisted moved the fighter to the fire that burned destroying the last hopes of those who had hoped and believed in a successful resumption of Italian arms.

A faint hope fueled by the reality of war that continued with ups and downs in the other battle fronts in North Africa, in Russia, in the Mediterranean, in the Atlantic.

He followed a day of silence full of troubling questions, but on November 26 arrived in Rome unexpectedly, still a new message from Col. Busoni:

"Gabaereo-Rome for Gen. Fougier.

Events at Gondar mature -think is matter of days -epic resistance will probably be overwhelmed by strong rebel hordes -but not (say no) to English of that will be of many responsibilities. Any luck hit me I hope to give consistently high -spirit news. I am grateful to your 01185 communication and thank you affectionately. Col. Busoni Darius."

The 27th morning units of the 25th African Brigade attacked on the road from Gorgora the advanced positions in defense of Azozò managing to correct with their armored vehicles thrust the resistance even to their sacrifice.

The armored vehicles burst on the airport manned by elements of the Azzurro Battalion. that with the aid of a 20 mm gunner section blocked the roam of armored cars on the field forcing them to fall back over the perimeter of the airport.

Later precise artillery fire hit the positions of the machine guns, killing 11 of the 18 men assigned to the two automatic guns while Hurricane fighters machine-gunned other Azozò defenders.

The 27th the offensive had suffered a great development and had progressed beyond the Magach occupying Guara and Abbaraghei and subsequently Badema, Tellach, Azozò and east Giagui, Defecià, Deva extreme cornerstones of the outer wall of Gondar.

The conquest of Azozò made possible the transit of armored cars and tanks on the road to Gondar, while the lorry track between Meleldibà-Gaveseg-Addis Alem advancing motorized divisions on tracked Bren Carriers that converged on the southern outskirts of Gondar on which pointed their armored vehicles coming by Azozò and headed to Conhicuc, Sabunaber, Eucè Dubà about 5 km from the town of Gondar.

In the late afternoon of 27 overwhelmed the last brave defenders including the faithful of the Ascari XXII Colonial Brigade, Gen. Nasi called for a truce as they continued fighting, was lost the main radio station and conquered the headquarters command of the theater before which was a response by the English that lasted until the morning of 28 November 1941, the struggle among the streets of the town flooded with thousands of Abyssinian raiders countered by Italian law enforcement CC.RR., G.d.F, PAI and other military supported in part of British regular troops.

On the day of the 27th Gondar not broadcast more communications and the Inviolata Valle radio station sent to the GS/RA the following message:

ADD -Roma from Guidonia -CRT-451/40-28.11 09.45 -ADD Office Digit Gabaereo-Rome-starts:

"I inform you that Radio Gondar not respond our calls at 07:45 hours on the 27th point. Therefore unable to forward your messages mentioned 6218/6216/7214 27 C. M. point. We continue listening to any service recovery. Stop. Radio Centro Guidonia".[228]

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On the 28th some of Gondar fire centers continued to resist and only after had insurance by Gen. Nasi the fighting stopped by Italians and yielded weapons after brave resistance even isolated garrisons of Ualag, Search, and Celgà Gorgora.

With the capture of the last defenders of the war in the territories of the Empire ceased permanently, even if for a few months yet occurred numerous guerrilla warfare conducted by Italian soldiers and natives.

The final defense of Gondar had cost the garrison loss of 562 national and colonial 1,526, injuring 1,343 between Italians and Indians, 272 were missing. Altogether over 3,700 casualties among the dead, wounded, missing. The 65% of the entire garrison remaining of Fort Amara! The greatest losses were suffered by colonial battalions to demonstrate tangibly that even in misfortune and in particularly difficult circumstances to the Italian arms, the Ascari Eritrea has always been faithful to Italy and those of more recent acquisition Ethiopians had done their duty of soldiers. The battle for Gondar was directed by Gen. Fowkes, commander of the 12th African Inf. Div., replacing Gen. Godwin-Austen sent to Egypt under the command of an army corps.

What forces in Fowkes available he had the 25th and 26th brigades (12th Division), the 140th Indian Regiment, 4 groups of irregular armed Abyssinians, a Regiment of South African and East Africa armored cars, a “I” tank unit "Mathilda".

With the conquest of Gondar and surrender of Gen. Nasi were captured 22,000 prisoners.[229]

The last lowering of the flag on the lost Italian E.A. empire territory. A chaplain blesses the flag, the soldiers move to touch, an aviator kisses the flag.

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CONCLUSIONS

The defense of the E.A. Empire lasting a total of 17 months and 18 days had cost the deaths of some 5,400 Italian officers and NCOs, 7,500 injured, 16,000 missing mostly prisoners out of a total of 75,000 called up or mobilized by the Armed Forces E.A. The losses of the partially recorded colonial troops until the spring of 1941 signaled the death of between 11,753 and 17,152 Askari and Dubats wounded, with little more than 3,000 missing, but these figures must be considered well below the reality being destroyed all the papers of colonial units of all of the battle.

According to the harsh judgment expressed by the British on the causes of the Italian defeat in East Africa, while it is true as it is true that the conquest of Abyssinia was made possible by the extensive use of motorized forces, with truck carried infantry, mechanized artillery, tanks of break through and exploitation of success, it is also true that the extraordinary lack of initiatives and tactical and strategic foresight of the Italian command, were the determining causes and concomitant of defeat, inertia demonstrated in long months under favorable operating and psychological profile, unnecessary offensive and wasteful operations such as the conquest of Somaliland and other minor operations.

Fail over to the means and armament also suitable and above all imagination, harnessed by a military professional education that did not keep any account of the characteristics of the land and of the people, the possibilities of bold action and unscrupulous compressed until such time as the initiative passed decisively in the hands of the British, whose forces do not exceed 1/3 of those fielded by the Comando Superior Armed Forces E.A. succeeded in only four months to get the better of the Italian resistance, and in turn in their favor the strategic outcome of the whole Ethiopian campaign. The remaining six months intervening till Gondar made were not simply the appearance now decided the residual military operations slowed by the rainy season but now launched fatally epilogue with the fatal isolation of Amara.

The dispersion of forces in the vast and difficult terrain of Ethiopia with the intention of defending everything up “the last inch of ground" was one of the other causes of the defeat and the problem goes dispersive also sought in the wrong use of the Air Force - numerically superior in the beginning of the war the RAF - but employed in a different form from its natural use in tactical function and always operating in the intentions of the higher ground commands.

A SLIM BRIDGE IN THE SKY BETWEEN ITALY AND E.A. (SAS/NCA)

From the first day of the war the E.A. territory remained isolated from Italy and was for about the SAS and Nuclei of Communications Planes if it was possible to renew in the month of June 1940, those necessary bonds that would secure until November 1941 continuity with the Motherland.

In the more than 340 links established with trimotor SM.82-83 and 75 they were lost several aircraft to accidents and enemy attacks and fell brave crews, but that vey thin but strong thread is never interrupted despite the enemy attack. In the month of November 1940 they were destroyed in Benina during a raid of the RAF 3 SM.79 at long range for the aviation sector of E.A.

With the three aircraft were lost numerous envelopes with leaflets of propaganda aimed at natives of Ethiopia and several cassettes with Muslim amulets referred to as “little hands of Fatima" that had to be launched to the Arabs to propitiate Italians.

In February 1941 we were forced to change because of the military situation, the northern landing zones of Eritrea (Gura-Gondar-Asmara) in favor of those more southern Ethiopia (Addis Ababa-Jimma) longer but deemed safe and were joined by SM.75 of Rossaldi commanders, Bonzi, Bolletti, Peroli, Orlandini, Lualdi, Bertolini, Battezzati. But also there airports were abandoned and transport must necessarily fall back to N.E. after the abandonment of Addis Ababa and of Galla and Sidama and then rely on Gondar whose limited size of the Azozò airport, did not allow take-off and landing at full load of SM.82 not providing sufficient security conditions to the characteristics the trimotor SM.82.[230]

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It was necessary to abandon the use of military trimotors of the SAS and replace them to use the neutral flagged of Jeddah in Saudi or Djibouti in French Somaliland with other militarized with civil registration type SM.83/SM.85 to supply the aircraft and take off fully loaded from these airports safer and larger and guarantee the neutrality of the international aspects required.

The E.A. air transport service in 1941 suffered serious losses of aircraft. February 3, had been destroyed in Gondar SM.73 I-GELA and ten days later is lost the I-NOLA both severely damaged in the landing.

February 15 for a rejected take-off for planted engines to the Tamet range limits, fell and irreparably harmed a SAS SM.82 directed to Asmara and carrying various materials and a CR.42 dismantled, this plane that was recovered and used later by the 18th Group CT.

The Unit of Maj. Vosilla, as well as escorts, protection and surveillance cruises coastal navigation, it was used to protect a Ro.37 of the 115th Sqd. by O.A. who daily they controlled the situation in the El Agheila area and Agedabia and to escort up to the limits of the autonomy SM.82 flying to the E.A..

April 3, taking off from Addis Ababa for Saudi Arabia the three-engine: I-NOVI (Peroli-Agostinelli), I-ARCO (Cazzaniga-Pretti) and I-VADO (Riva-Girassetti) with 6 specialists and 30 passengers total between pilots and RA staff E.A. and after many adventures and vicissitudes of all kinds can reach Rome after 40 days of departure.

The escape from E.A. of 3 SM.73 I-NOVI, I-ARCO, I-VADO of the Transportation Command E.A. about to be caught in Addis Ababa, was authorized by the Viceroy sensitized appropriately by Capt. Aldo Tait flight aide to Amedeo of Savoy.

The proposal was feasible since the three planes while being militarized still retained the civil registration of the Ala Littoria, were not considered war aircraft, and could have assistance and facilitation by neutral countries. 11 pilots were selected and as many specialists as crews, supplemented by 20 other Air Force airmen no longer needed to the Motherland that the certain prospect of imprisonment under English control (14 pilots and 16 specialists between NCOs and graded).

The three multi-engine took off from Addis Ababa 3 April 1941 at 16:15 hours with stops in Sifani, Dessie and Danakil after being spaced out from the starting lineup to prevent further danger. The next day two SM.73 reached Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, where they were joined on the 9th by the third plane was delayed by some technical complications in Assab. The crews, however, were confined by the Saudi authorities in a building at the edge of the field until the 8th of May, when after passing with the help of Italian diplomatic authorities obstacles of all kinds diseases, mechanical breakdowns, lack of spare parts, problems of autonomy, the aircraft had finally permission to leave and were able to take off almost clandestinely. After reaching Benghazi to 2,250 km away, they landed in Rome on May 12 after a good 6270 kilometers of flight paths, largely over territories occupied by the enemy.

An aviation enterprise of all relief that allowed the Air Force to use for connecting flights later to E.A. at least half of the airmen rescued.

After the loss of landing fields of Eritrea, Shoa, Danakil and Galla and Sidama, connected this last place in the month of May by the Commander Bonzi the tri-motor landed fortuitously in Jimma before the abandonment of the city, remained free only in the Amara the Azozò airfield of Gondar, which was reached for the first time in June by SM.75 I-LUNO Commander Max Peroli, the same brave pilot who had saved one of three SM.73 in April, escaping capture in the airfield of Addis Ababa. The first connection to Gondar made by Peroli, began on June 20 with the multi-engine takeoff from Rome having as 2nd pilot Lt. Marciano and specialists Ballati and Boero who completed the crew.

The first stop Rome-Benghazi was covered in 7-hour flight and after the need to supply the I-LUNO took off at sunset with route to the S.E. equivalent to over 10 flying hours Gondar where he landed happily at the dawn of the 21st, arranged to download the material, loaded faster documents, mail, serious injuries and then left again to Djibouti to complete the refueling, which took off for Benghazi to a flight of 16 consecutive hours, returning to Rome in the evening of June 22, after covering 12,000 kilometers in 43 hours of flight on overall 82 used to start and complete the enterprise.[231]

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One episode among many that deserves reflection and admiration for the high spirit of sacrifice, dedication and professional value demonstrated by the protagonists. On July 5 new link with Gondar and return to Rome on a flight of 38 effective hours. July 29 and August 5 Commander Peroli reaches Gondar again with a new SM. 75 passing over the travel some dangerous situations arising on board.

Another link on 23 August assisted in flight by the "untouched" radio of Guidonia and the Airborne control radio stations in Benghazi/Benina and Gondar/Azozò he had avoided, the latter with his invaluable contribution, an unpleasant encounter with British fighters that machine-gunned the airfield, avoided the I-LUNO with appropriate diversion.

On August 3 new link with the SM.75 I-LUNO (Commander Bonzi) fitted with the International Red Cross markings as required by the French authorities and authorized by the Geneva Committee on 07/24/1941 in order to prevent interference and reprisals, it was hoped by Englishman who did not recognize this international guarantee.

On October 3, the I-LUNO still took off from Rome to reach Gondar which arrived at dawn of the 5th during an attack on the peripheral of the defensive positions. Lands, download, upload and starts to Djibouti where it arrived at 10:30; shortly after the three-engine is attacked and set on fire by a British fighter, type "Mohawk" warned almost certainly by a complacent French informer. Saved the crew and passengers. The burden and the privilege to recover in Djibouti colleague Max Peroli "dismounted" from the RAF after the destruction of the I-LUNO was entrusted by the command to the SAS Commandant Orlandini and Lualdi joined by Del Bufalo and the engineer Manservigi - two of the best specialists in the Special Aircraft Service.

Took off from Rome/Littorio with long range SM.75 I-LAME at 08:30 on October 14, the three-engine landing in Benghazi K.2. at 14:00 which embarked 8,000 liters of fuel during refueling undergoing a heavy air raid on the airport fortunately without any consequences for the transport aircraft.

Took off immediately after the enemy attack, the SM.75 reached Gondar at 01:30 on the 15th and the 20th off again after just stop for Djibouti. The last stretch from Libya to Gondar, had affected the overflight of much of hostile territory.

The route through the Libyan desert and Sudan overflown with conventional radio service, always provided, and then Lualdi was connected to the beam of Kerna with bright path of the Blue Nile, then flying on a desert stretch between Singa and Roseires and finally turn 90° east towards the foothills of Amara taking the big bright mirror of lake Tana as an ideal reference point for reaching Gondar. Intermittent short signal from the ground and then appeared the track bounded by the headlights of two vehicles. The device is quickly downloaded mail, medicines and documents that may disappear in the dark. Dozens of hands of unknown Italian soldiers huddle warmly those of airmen mumbling words of thanks, greetings, encouragement, hope and promise. Loading some wounded and seriously ill people including a boy and mail, so mail to Italy far from the besieged of Gondar; Then a warm and collective last hasty hug and moved to the Commander Maner Lualdi: "... please kiss Italy for me," murmured someone in the dark causing commotion among aviators.

No time to indulge in feelings since the war is near and does not grant any sentimentality than that of duty.

The device vibrates and roars quietly gearing up, then with more force moves in the dark aided by flashlights and shifts slowly taxiing to the baseline where peep bright at times, rhythmically, the headlights of a truck to report at limit of the Azozò plateau. The I-LAME wheel axle, straightens and gets in line aiming the distant headlights of another truck; increase engine revolutions now thunderous roar, you give up the brakes and the large multi-engine disappears faster and faster on the field drowned in the dark, it lifts heavier at the bottom, turns slowly eastward and heads of Djibouti to land at the Asaitu- Gran Barrà airfield to refuel, take on the flyers of I-LUNO, take off for Libya arriving in Rome at 16:00 on October 16, after 14 hours of flying.

One episode among many noted among the SAS documents.[232]

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On 11 November .when Gondar was now almost at the end invested enemy offensive, the veteran SM.75 I- LAME (with crew composed of the Lt. Guido Bartolini and Fernando Battezzati, radio operator Carlo Profumo, the engineer Giacomo Timolina), landed in Djibouti at 08:00 from Benghazi and after refueling took off for Gondar to deliver his load, but during the flight to the besieged city was forced to make an emergency landing in near Magdala which tragically ended with the aircraft rollover and fire and the entire staff's death. It was the last flight before the fall of Gondar and the E.A. final loss.

Particularly challenging was the work of the 149th Group T of the SAS of SM.82 assigned to routes for the E.A., with trips to materials, equipment, mail, military and civilian personnel, disassembled aircraft and aviation engines.

In 1941, an SM.82 was lost on February 13 at Zula airport due to aerial strafing; another trimotor was set on fire at Gura on the 26th of the same month. In March, 15 CR.42s and 8 Fiat A.74 engines were airlifted to IEA with the loss of 2 transport trimotors and at such an intense rate that no less than 8 SM.82 pilots made 13 to 15 connections each between Libya and IEA.

The last CR.42 for aviation I.E.A. was delivered in Gura March 28: an appreciated gift on the day of the 180th anniversary of the founding of the Force Air Force!

On April 4 with a SM.82 departing from Addis Ababa to Italy under the command of Maj. Egidio Pellizzari, is charged by the commander of the three-engine to bring to the family Amedeo di Savoia-Aosta, the spiritual testament and decorations of the Viceroy of Ethiopia. The three-engine SM.82 of Captain Giles Pellizzari of SAS performed a different flight and landed back in Ethiopia at Sifani at the end of April with a engine disorder that did not guarantee the trip. Was immediately checked by the field workshop specialists of the Capt. Gari Berzi who along with his immediate boss Maj. Gari Zattoni had performed miracles in 10 months of war in repairing, restoring and maintain the aircraft in efficiency of I.E.A..

It took 8 days of hard work to restore the efficiency of the three-engine of Pellizzari, stretch to nearly 2000 meters the sandy Sifani track considering the considerable height of the field, the high temperature of the Danakil, the load of the aircraft, the soft ground but the professional skills of commander Pellizzari could overcome any further difficulty taking off in the afternoon of May 4 to Benghazi that was reached at dawn on, next day.

Before take-off had been delivered to the Capt. Pellizzari other important documents and personal belongings of Amedeo d'Aosta to be delivered to the Duchess in Italy -The last tangible thought before his capture at Amba Alagi and death in the small hospital in Nyeri Kenya.

Links to Gondar whose airport did not offer enough space for takeoff and landing of SM.82 were built SM.75 using modified autonomy but carrying loads much lower than the 82 storage capacity. To return the aircraft they reached Djibouti and prior agreements established with the CIAF were refueled and were depart from Italy, flying again Gondar, Sudan, Libya.

The most pressing appeal to the Supreme Command by Gen. Nasi from Gondar, was about sending money to pay for and prevent colonial troops from desertion. On August 30, a first SM.75 took off with 60 million in notes, followed the next day by another three-engine with 60 million lire and then again on September 7 by a third SM.75 with 60 million, 10,000 sterling, RT materials, 12.7 cal. ammunition for fighters.

It was thought to also intervene three-engined SM.82 that had drop the material on the Azozò airfield and then go to Italy after the technical stop in Djibouti.

But this hypothesis did not find application to a number of problems related to the flight, no ultimate protection of the three-engine in the Gondar area to be flown over at low altitude made very difficult by the lack of fighters.

Between June and November, the SAS I.E.A. effected 10 internal connecting flights between Gojam and Galla-Sidama landing at Azozò and Jimma with radio links very difficult due to lack of direction finding equipment, radio beacons, technical assistance sufficiently and it was thanks the professional expertise of the pilots if it was possible to find more than 4,000 km flight the planned airport, flying over enemy territory and the occupied and guarded by the enemy in I.E.A..

The table of flights between Italy and the I.E.A. and the quantity in kilograms of the transported materials, saw the following statistical situation:[233]

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1940						
June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Kg. 1,000	7,500	35,500	66,000	55,000	35,000	22,000

aircraft used: n. 179
People transported: n. 474
Material: kg. 228,483

1941										
Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.
Kg.58,000	42,000	40,000	1823	-	1,500	910	3,100	2,400	5,100	2,400

aircraft used: n. 125
People transported: n. 332
Material: kg. 134902

War activity Air Force I.E.A.
period (11 Jan. 1941/27 Nov 1941)

	1940 (10 Jun. 1940/10 Jan 1941)	1941 (10 Jun. 1940/27 Nov. 1941)
Bombers (maritime reconnaissance)		
Missions performed (n. 265 Colonial Police)	184	1,018
flight hours preformed	552	4,252
Airplanes operated	736	2,636
Amount of explosives launched (kg.)	100,000	440,000
Enemy aircraft shot down	4	21
Enemy aircraft destroyed on the ground	14	21
Aircraft lost in action	24	73
Aircraft stricken for accident (or destroyed on the ground)	178	171
Aircraft captured by the enemy	8	8

Fighters/Assault		
Missions carried out (no. 85 colonial police)	412	1562
flight hours performed	1,648	4,848
Aircraft employed	1,236	2,836
Amount of explosives launched (kg.)	1,250	1,250
Bullets fired	180,000	420,000
Enemy aircraft shot down	45	121
enemy aircraft destroyed on the ground	36	64
The aircraft lost in action	38	67
Aircraft stricken for accident (or destroyed on the ground)	37	95
Aircraft captured by the enemy	4	4

Observation Aircraft		
The Missions performed (n. 760 colonial police)	63	1,305
flight hours performed	124	1044
Airplanes operated	116	576
Amount of explosives launched (kg.)	2,400	15,000
Bullets fired about	21,000	105,000
Enemy aircraft shot down	1	3
Aircraft lost in action	2	4
Aircraft lost in accidents (or destroyed on the ground)	5	9[234]

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Air Transport I.E.A (SAS)	1940	1941
Missions carried out (external flights / domestic)	186+142	316+ 342
hours of flight preformed	930 + 2,272	1,260 + 5,920
used aircraft	1,116 + 142	1,590 + 359
Transverse Km.	919,000	1,635,000
transported material (kg.)	281,902	455,483
Mail / baggage carried (kg.)	41,200	105,000
Persons transported (external flights / domestic)	1,700+ 832	3,526+ 1,770
Aircraft lost in action	2+ 4	6+9
aircraft stricken by accidents (or destroyed on the ground)	8	15
Aircraft captured by the enemy	1	1
Flights to training / transfer / Transport Mail / materials		9,682

Personnel: killed- wounded- missing		
Officers	32	47
NCOs	41	68
Ranks/specialists -Airmen	245	418
TOTAL	318	533

Flight material lost	
Ca.133/B	n. 167
Ca.133/T	n. 9
SM.81	n. 59
SM.79	n. 57
SM.73	n. 6
Ca.14.8 / T	n. 5
SM.82	n. 1
CR.32	n. 34
CR.42	n. 83
Ro.37 Bis	n. 13
Ca.l00	n. 2
Fokker	n. 1
Ca.111	n. 17
Ca.l01	n. 4
Sa.202	
TOTAL	n. 482

Aircraft shot down by DICAT

	1941	1940/1941
Bomber / fighter / reconnaissance aircraft (of which 74 from R.M. batteries)	68	133[235]

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CHAPTER FOUR

The air war in Greece, Yugoslavia, Aegean, Eastern Mediterranean
The Greek campaign- Final Cycle
(Italian offensive Period 3 Jan. – 22 April 1941)

The Greek campaign- Final Cycle -Gaudo and Matapan –The aerial attack on the Mediterranean Fleet -The "Greece British Expeditionary Force" - The exigency East - Yugoslavia - The attack preparation -The participation of R.A. –The Yugoslavia attack - Conclusions: Greece surrenders to Axis - The air freight in the war of Greece - Conclusions: The Air Force occupies the Ionic islands - The airdrop of Kefalonia - Operation "Merkur" - Luftwaffe and Mediterranean Fleet - the Italian assistance to "Merkur" - Agean/Dodecanese - The special "Iraq" squadron -New commands in the eastern Mediterranean – G.A. 3 -The air collaboration in the enterprise of Alexandria.[236]

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The Air War in Greece

With the approach of spring, manifested tangibly strengthen the Italian military presence in Albania and ensured at the same time, a decreased Greek army reactive capacity, these aspects which were beginning to positively create the premises of military and moral redemption of Italian Arms sorely tried by heavy political events and military disaster events in November-December 1940. The major event at the beginning of 1941 was the death of General Metaxas head of the Greek government, which was replaced in his high office by the Minister of Government Assistance Alexander Koryzis.

The work and the continued commitment of Gen. Cavallero had contributed greatly to establish such premises and while the G.S. of the Command Superior Armed Forces Albania began to put in place the deployment for the final offensive, the Air Force was required increased surveillance and protection for responsibly ensure the aid in military operations, ensuring continuity with the logistical organization and to preserve and supply to the front of new units in ever-increasing numbers they were massed for the final attack.

In anticipation of the general offensive the G.S./RA arranged to strengthen with new and more efficient units to Albania's air force and 4th Air Fleet, so the contribution the Air Force would offer to the effort that was preparing to support the Army, found to be adequate to the results and hopes that the G.S.G is proposed to conclude successfully the harsh, tormented war with Greece.

The decreased presence of the "Gladiator" by part of the enemy, however, offset by a greater availability of "Hurricane", led the G.S./RA to send to Albania units equipped with the most suitable flight material able to compete effectively with the new and fearsome British fighters. For this purpose was intensified the influx of fighter units with MC.200 and were gradually replaced with the more efficient model, the CR 32/42 assignment to the 150th and 160th Groups.

Between 5 and 7 March moved in order of time into Albania the 371st Sqd. CT sent to Vlora and 22nd Group C.T. assigned to Tirana with a total of 52 MC.200.

For the bombardment, in addition to the total replacement of the SM.81 intended to SAS, it was provided to assign twin-engine BR.20M to the 38th Stormo, to strengthen the dive bomber specialties by sending the 238th Sqd. Picchiatori of Ju.87, to increase the O.A units with the 114th Sqd. of Ro.37 bis.[237]

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Also strengthened was the 4th Air Fleet also in Apulia, which was enhanced with the 73rd Sqd. CT with MC.200, with the 208th Sqd. BaT. with Stukas, who thus poised the presence of identical aircraft in Albania that had provided such excellent results in precision and destructive attacks on particular military interest aims with great satisfaction for the Italian Air Force.

Even the air component of the tactical support had some news with the application of the CR.42 bomber type Nardi and 150th Group CT first to experience this innovation by making successful attacks against the Greek positions and batteries in Albania (Val Desnizza).

On March 4, there was a violent aerial combat in the skys over the Port of Palermo between 11 G.50 of the 24th Group in protective flight to our ships and RAF “Hurricanes" (33rd Sqd.) considerably superior then our fighters. In the unequal fight our pilots managed to put down six enemy aircraft were lost but two G.50 piloted by young NCOs: Sergeants De Savia Marcello has just turned 20 and Luigi Spallacci 21, which for their admirable behavior and contribution in the fight were both decorated with the Gold Medal

On 19 March began hastily perhaps the first Italian offensive hastily after the autumn-winter crisis. The plan of attack was prepared by General Gastone Gambara, and provided for an offensive in Val Desnizza of the “Cagliari” Div. to bypass the opponent line, while the “Puglie" would attack the Bregu Rapit area and the “Pinerolo" at Ciafa Lusit, would flow in the direction of Val Desnizza, to complete the intended movement encircling then meeting with the “Cagliari” on completion of the intended of movement; IV Corp however engage frontally with certain alternative movements the enemy to prevent any movement in the direction of the attacked areas.

In anticipation of that first resumed offensive, albeit limited to a single sector but it means as to test the entire enemy position, test "bleed" that Gen. Cavallero had set up in the previous two months after his assumption of command and get the desired results, Mussolini wanted to attend in person operation to instill courage and moral certainty of recovery to the troops of the front sorely tried by long months of drabness and failures, and wanted next to him, as a token of esteem and confidence , the Chief of Staff/RA Gen. Pricolo who for a long time had briefed daily and objectively, honestly and bluntly, about the real situation in Albania, the disorganization of commands, about the shortcomings of each identified type: logistical, technical, welfare, health, moral and training missions of the units. A courageous and necessary that was highly appreciated by the Duce, who for the first time since the war began, he made it clear account of the reality and truth of the facts on the preparation of the Italian Armed Forces, then observed in person during his visit to Albania.

On March 2, Mussolini flew from Bari to Tirana with 3 SM.79 the result, accompanied and observed in a direct line on Brindisi, by 2 Cant.506/B for maritime escort and a squadron of MC.200 of the 153rd Group for that airline who very discreetly and without the knowledge of the Duce, Gen. Pricolo had properly planned and prepared well knowing Mussolini's aversion to escort and protection to his person in the course of his movements, but in the particular circumstance constituted a fair and sensible reason to prevention and safety.

The welcome for the troops made the Duce was affectionate, enthusiastic, very warm and encouraging and Gen. Pricolo noted the emotion and joy of Mussolini to the contact with the soldiers, who repaid in spades of all bitterness and painful disappointment in the previous months by the various commands and commanders scattered between Rome and Albania.

Deployed along the front in March were 14 Greek divisions with 42 Infantry Regiments and 19 Italian divisions with 38 Infantry Regiments, echeloned along a 48 km long, mostly mountainous line.

Brought to the observatory of Mount Komarit at the mouth of the Desnizza Valley, Mussolini attended the report on the operation explained by General Gambara, whose plan was judged simple and straightforward, and the following day - 9 March - the "Val Desnizza" offensive began after an artillery preparation made of about 300 cannons that fired no less than 100,000 rounds on enemy positions. At 07:00 the infantry launched the attack preceded by intense aerial bombardments on Trebescines and adjacent areas, while fighters and reconnaissance aircraft shot and machine-gunned Togliari, Kuk, Mezgorani, Gerova, Ciafa, Sofit, Caizza, Psari and the thugs hit with precision targets judged very important by the land commands at Suka, Spadarit, Mezgorani, Toscisci, p. 1308 of Trebescines.[238]

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A total of about one hundred aircraft took turns in the attacks from early morning until dusk, to provide the troops with concrete support and effective assistance from the Air Force in the IX Army sector.

The RAF made only a brief appearance on the battlefield, called definitely alarmed by Greeks commands for the vastness of the attack, bombarding the Ghiciocut area with "Blenheim" escorted by "Gladiator", some of which also strafed the slopes of Komarit where was the Italian G.S. with the Duce, but were promptly intercepted by our fighters who shot down four British biplanes under the complacent eyes of Gen. Pricolo and Mussolini who had witnessed the fight.

Three days later, despite the efforts of the soldiers and the heavy losses suffered by the Greek, the Italian offensive had not recorded any substantial success and was then suspended. It was found that the enemy was still very strong, fought tenaciously, he was perched on dominant positions that garrisoned with valor, but there is more convinced, once again, that the training and equipment of the Italian soldier could not yet be considered suitable for lack of methods and weaponry for mountain warfare with modern criteria and innovators, through not the old, outdated traditional Italian tactical patterns a legacy of the World War.

On March 21, Mussolini, ascertained visually the failed attack and greatly experienced in the moral, off again from Devoli to Bari once again disappointed and saddened by the failure and the same evening returned to Centocelle from Bari piloting his old SM.81 tri-motor. The war on the Albanian front continued!

On March 13 battle between CR.42, MC.200, "Gladiator" and "Hurricane" and killing of five enemy aircraft against loss of 2 CR.42. The day after new fighting between a patrol of CR.42 who attacked a formation of “Blenheim” en route to Valona escorted by "Hurricane" and "Gladiator", with the result that the vehemence of the Italian pilots forced the British bombers to reverse the going off-route in case their explosive load, and then left at high speed in pull-up to the borders of Greece. The outcome of the clash with the enemy fighter escort was 4 British aircraft shot down against two Italians lost.[239]

3/9/1941 - From Monle Komarit Observatory Mussolini observes the outcome of the offensive "Val Desnizza" The battle against the Greek positions duration 5 days, was adjourned on the 14th by Gen. Cavallero for the failure to achieve success

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The rate of losses that the British bomber aircraft suffered during its raids on Albanian ports and airfields forced the RAF command in Greece to give up daytime missions and intensify night missions to the maximum, with the British leaders objectively considering the lack of an effective Italian night defense organization, especially night fighters, the true "Achilles heel" of the Italian Air Force. This gap encouraged some Italian commanders to set up night interception sections using pilots who were experts in instrument navigation and using the normal aircraft supplied to fighter units, but the experiment did not yield positive results and the numerous missions carried out in the dark were rather disappointing and tied to the random possibility of running into an enemy in the sky, relying on luck and the adversary's mistakes. An eventuality that occurred only on a couple of occasions in four months with the downing by CR.42s and MC.200s of a Blenheim and a Wellington respectively in the skies of Tirana and Valona.

Even in the winter of 1941, the transport of equipment, Aeralba handle supplies to garrisons blocked by bad weather in the high mountains. Air containers type Bordini come packaged with material necessities for air drop.

On March 18 came online a new dive bomber unit: 101st Group BaT (Maj. G. Donadio) of Ju.87 was going to strengthen the Aeralba tactical aviation.

On March 23rd, new combat in the skies of Devoli with Hurricanes 2 of which were shot down by our fighters and another hit by the AA batteries.[240]

In view of the imminent offensive against the Greek army, Foreign Minister Ciano arrives in Bari aboard his "*ad personam*" SM 73. Minister with the rank of Lt. Col. pilot was in charge to the 46th Stormo BT with which he participated in military missions

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The long and terrible winter 1940/41 is finally going for the fighters of Albania, pilots, specialists, airmen are heated to fire an improvised bonfire lit on an Albanian airport

On the 25th of the same month, during a skirmish in the sky, Maj. Oscar Molinari, commander of the 160th Group CT, died in a flight accident with the aircraft damaged during the return phase to base, and the veteran Albanian unit was temporarily entrusted to Capt. Virginio Teucci. A brave commander of fighter units who had led his pilots on several occasions to combat against the aggressive enemy, died with Maj. Molinari.

More steady and continuous instead of the daily activities of the bombers of Albania and Apulia, who methodically continued their missions against enemy targets on Greece and in the immediate rear of the front.

They were reached and bombed the town of Preveza, Navarino, Larissa, Paramithia on whose field were set on fire two enemy planes; attacked Ioannina, Agrinio, and also railway lines, ports, ships at sea and at anchor and again tactical objectives in Podgorani, Arza, Boli, Psari, Brego, Giulei, Galice, Pigerasi, Borsch, Gjirokastra, which was attacked from the air, since it had been occupied by the enemy, as many as 45 times with the launch of 135 tons of explosives.

In late March came to Albania also the 87th Sqd. O.A. of Ca.311 of which was deployed on the small field of Peqini. With new and more efficient twin-engine was possible to make longer and rational photographic reconnaissance missions and to view, to play a more effective tactical actions for they could carry up to 400 kg. of explosive and fragmentation bombs with a range up to 1600 km. A remarkable technical improvement for the services of tactical survey of the Albanian front. The Navy returned in part to the British the blow of Taranto in the night on March 26, when a group of assault craft (motor boats torpedo SMA) attacked the naval base of Souda in Crete used by the Royal Navy, and sank the heavy cruiser ”York“, which rested on the bottom with the bridge and emerged still usable and an oil tanker. An excellent result with a handful of brave men and prepared and with a few modest but efficient means of offense.

In April remarkable results were obtained by the Stukas dive-bomber groups: On April 4 one Ju.87 piloted by Lt. Cenni near Corfu sank the steamer "Susanna" and in the afternoon of the same day a Picchiatore of the 239th Sqd. sank another ship in the waters of the island.

On April 5, swooping attacks on Guri i Topit and, starting from the first week of the month, mass attacks by groups of Picchiata of the 96th, 97th, and in 101st bombed Perati, Doliana, Corfu where it was sunk cargo ship "Joanna" of 3000 GRT.; Albanian and Greek rail vehicles also suffered uninterrupted attacks until the moment when the Greek army, sorely tried by so many months of effort exceeded its capacity and ability, exhausted began to retreat beyond the boundaries of Chameria. During the final phase of the attack cycle a Ju.87 was hit by anti-aircraft fire and the crew forced to land in enemy zone was captured.

But before the final and decisive offensive unleashed by the Italian army happened some important events occurred in the Balkans.[241]

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In view of the spring offensive, specialists monitor and debug the planes assigned to them A Ro 37 of the 5th Group OA (Maj. Sisto) deployed on the field of Peqini in Albania.

GAUDO And MATAPAN
(26 to 29 March 1941)

In March the Supermarina, pressured by the German Navy, decided to make a thrust into Cretan waters to stop the flow of convoys to Greece with the British Expeditionary Force, whose presence would have made it hard for the Wehrmacht in the planned operation "Marita" (attack on Greece) expected in early April.

The naval operation would be supported and coordinated intervention of Italian-German Air Force (X Flieger Korps in Sicily – 4th Air Fleet in Puglia - Aegean Air Force) with a precise division of tasks, while considering objectively dangerous presence an empty indefensible up to the 21st meridian, which had to be forcibly left uncovered for impossibility of monitoring of air units of Puglia and the Dodecanese, due to the known limitations of autonomy of the Italian aircraft. In this area not protected the Navy had to do for at least 4 hours exclusively rely on its own strength, but using the 25 catapultable Ro.43 aircraft supplied aboard the cruisers of the 1st, 3rd and 8th Naval Divisions and the "Vittorio Veneto" assigned to the operation.

This embarked endowment assigned according to the expected arraignment: 3 aircraft Ro.43 to the B.B. type "Vittorio Veneto", 2 Ro.43 each Hvy. cruisers "Zara", "Pola", " Fiume " 3 Ro.43 to Hvy. cruisers "Trieste", "Trento", "Bolzano", 4 Ro.43 to cruisers "Duca degli Abruzzi" and "Garibaldi", for a total of 25 floatplanes. The purpose and the eventual success of operation "Gaudo" (as it was called by Supermarina) were based:

a) on the achievement of surprise;

b) the assistance of efficient aerial exploration;

c) on aerial protection of ships necessary to keep out enemy scouts and to repel attacks by torpedo-bombers.[242]

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The operation was to be built on the support of five submarines arranged along the planned route of the Italian Fleet. They were made agreements with the X C.A.T. command and Superaereo.

The operation "Gaudo", moreover originated from a proposal made since February by Adm. Angelo Jachino battle fleet commander and implemented in principle by the Chief of Staff of the Italian Navy Adm. Riccardi, included an thrust into the Aegean with battleships and cruisers and basically coincided with what was suggested at the conference of Merano by representatives of the German Navy, which would make up for momentary shortage of naphtha that haunted the Italian Navy, with urgent supplies and would also effectively advocated in the OKW level, the support of the Luftwaffe which the Italian Navy held in a particular way for a number of reasons: mental reservations to the RA, alleged increased efficiency and capacity for action of the Luftwaffe, the possibility of interfering directly in the operation mode by placing a full extent of the escort and surveillance services as its own "naval aviation", the best flight characteristics and techniques of German aircraft, more confidence and safety in the performance of the tasks.

The very secretive airtight operation and secret for obvious security reasons, was distorted and made vulnerable the mistaken superficiality which with Supermarina transmitted via radio on March 23, 1941 the entire course of naval operations to a series of commands involved, specifying even the meeting place at sea set at 34° 56' latitude and 19° 16' longitude, omitting only when the day set for the operation, subsequently issued also by radio on March 24-25 with three days in advance on the one established, also including the Aegean Naval Command forewarned with telegram (message sent by air) and the much more important than the X Flieger Korps has long monitored closely by the English Ultra Organization who pick upped and decrypted radio messages regularly between Italy and Germany in the Mediterranean.

It was evident, for many years, even the Italian Navy used the same methods of interception, that the English, if in possession of the Italian secret ciphers (they had deciphered them since September 1940 after having captured a few) could easily intercept radio communications and coming aware of the whole operation, which in fact occurred.[243]

Charging small bombs on a trimolore of Sqd 253rd (104th Group/46th Stormo BT), The final offensive against Greece saw the total employment of the RA, engaged with Albania units and the 4th Air Fleet in Puglia.

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On the same day in -25 March - Adm. Cunningham was informed by the Interception Center of Bletchey Park where Ultra resided, which corresponded to March 25 as day X-1. Thus Operation “Gaudo" was known to the enemy even before its execution with serious injury on the outcome of the mission. It was certainly a grave error to transmit radio messages, including one signed by Gen. Guzzoni - Deputy Chief G.S.G. - without assessment in his just measure the likelihood of a possible enemy decryption.

The presence of the Italian Naval Fleet departing from Taranto was reported at 12:30 pm of the day on March 27 by a Sunderland of the 230th Sqdn. Coastal Command of Mediterranean based in Malta.

At that time the M.F. had available to it the C.V. "Formidable" with FAA Sqdns. 803rd, 806th, 826th, 829th with 47 aircraft between Fulmar, Albacore, Swordfish; some catapult planes the 700th Sqdn. and a section of 815th Sqdn. Swordfish posted in Maleme in Crete.

For its part the RAF had in Greece 5 bomber squadrons of Blenheim and Wellington (11th, 30th, 84th, 113th, 211th) and 4 fighter (33rd, 80th, 112th, 208th) with Gloster Gladiator, Hurricane and Westland, force that could contribute effectively during a naval battle anywhere on the eastern Mediterranean, which considering the ideal epicenter south of Crete (as actually occurred then) the separation of the neighboring British bases included 300 km from the Peloponnesus and 280 km from Cyrenaica.

Quite different was the Italian Air Force situation that had the closest bases in Rhodes (440 km), Apulia, and Calabria (km. 810), Albania (850 km) and Sicily (900 km) seat of the X Fl.Kps. many of which the autonomy of flight limits of its bombers (km. 1.900 for SM.79, 2,000 km to Cant.1007) and certainly forbidden for fighters that did not exceed 900 km range for the more modern types. Only CR.42 based at Karpathos could remain in the area between 20-25 minutes.

Thus there were good conditions for intervention if the Italian fleet had ventured into the Cretan waters to stop the flow of supplies to Greece, where the command for the Middle East was moving 3 Inf. Div. reinforced by a armored Bd and support troops, thousands of vehicles, more than 60 thousand tons of materials and essential supplies for an Expeditionary Corp of 50-60,000 soldiers.[244]

The GR 42, the 160th Group CT Autonomous a veteran unit of the war in Albania, returning to Valona after a war mission, taxiing on the wooden track built to ensure complete usability during flooding due to rains.

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The contribution to the operation from part of the Italian Air Force and X CAT stationed in Sicily provided the following missions:

Aerial exploration
day X
Reconnaissance of bases of Alexandria and Suda – morning and afternoon (R.A. Aegean -X CAT)

Day X + 1
With fighter planes escort until autonomy limit (4th Air Fleet).
Reconnaissance between the parallels of Syracuse and Malta to the east of Sicily until 20° meridian East (Benghazi) - from morning to sunset (R.A. Sicily).
Reconnaissance S.E. Gulf of Taranto up to 300 miles from Taranto (Taranto Marinavia). Reconnaissance on Channel of Caso - Alexandria direction (morning) (R.A. Aegean). Reconnaissance in eastern Sicily between parallel 33° and 36° and the meridian 26° East (morning and afternoon) (X C.A. T.).

Day X +2
Reconnaissance Aegean southern basin including Suda -morning and afternoon (RA Aegean) with special reference area between Crete-Morea-Saronic Gulf-Milo-Cape Sidero (Marinavia Aegean) Survey in eastern Sicily between parallel 32° and 35° until the meridian 26° East (morning and afternoon) (X C.A.T.)
Reconnaissance direction of Channel Caso -Alexandria (morning and afternoon) (R.A. Aegean). Reconnaissance south of Crete (morning) (R.A. Aegean).

Air protection
Day X + 1
From 08:00 am to sunset overflight by heavy fighters (Bf. 110) of the two naval formations mutually spaced 10- miles to help protect from the air (X C.A.T.).
X + 2 day
Protection with fighter planes from 07:00 to 9:00 around Crete (Aegean R.A.).
Naval Force protection up to 2 hours before sunset to the west as long as the 21° meridian and north of the 36° parallel (max point of the Bf.110 fighter penetrationwith an autonomy of 1,100 km) (X C.A.T.).[245]

Washing and cleaning of the fighters of the 154th G 50 Group CT Autonomous In the spring of 1941 the Greek Army had been severely worn down by the huge effort made in the 5 months of the war with Italy and was on the verge of collapse.

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Preparation in Sicily of 20 fighter planes (He.111-Ju.88) with autonomy between the 1800 - 2000 km) (X C.A.T.).

Direct air contribution

Day X +1

Air raids on Malta airport (X C.A.T.). Barrage east of Malta with fighter planes (X C.A.T.).

X + 2 day

Bombing at dawn of Crete airports (R.A. Aegean).

Armed reconnaissance since dawn the next area in Crete (22° E) 30 miles to the west Cape Matapan (Aegean Air). Air preparation of bombers and torpedo planes (23 between, Cant. 1007 Bis SM.79) of Aegean Air Force.

Positions of Naval Force.

Day X + 1

20:00 -34° 56' Lat. -19° 16' Long. – distance 180 miles for 350° from Benghazi (Online Flying Distance from bases in Cyrenaica km 300).

X + 2 day

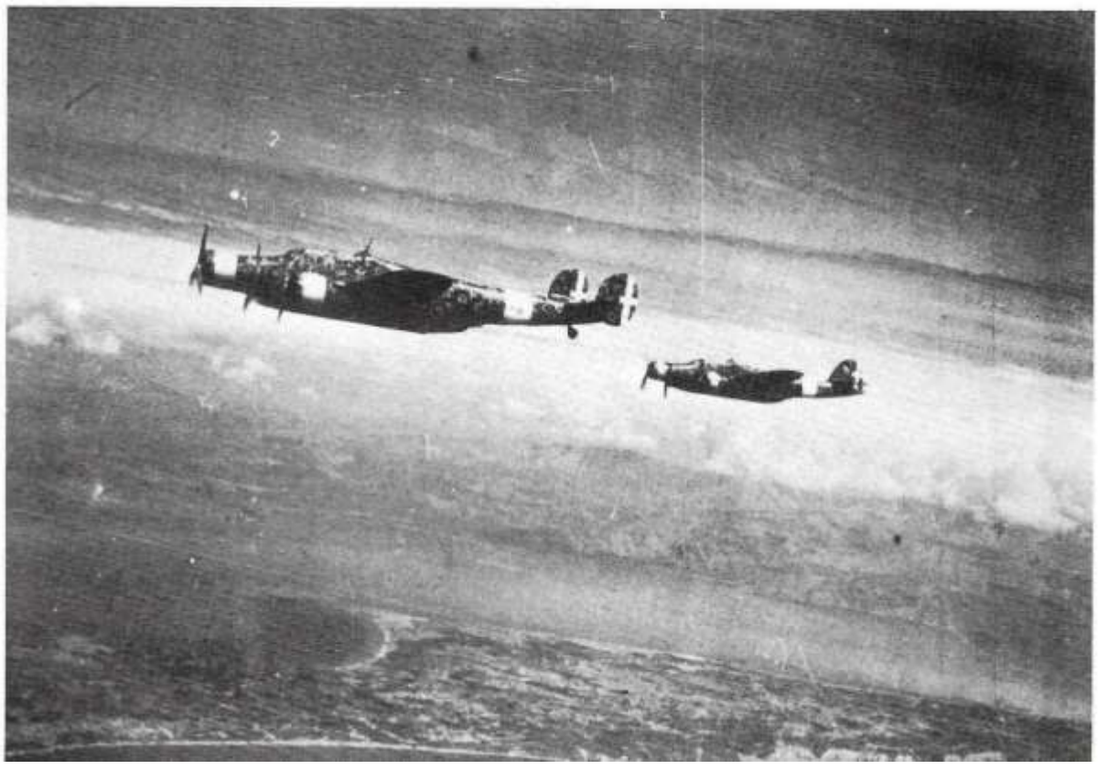
07:00 -34° 50' Lat. 24° 15' Long. - Group "Veneto" - 20 miles south of Crete - point of maximum penetration southern.

Hours 13:34 - 35° 20' Lat. - 21° 70' Long. - 100 Miles west of Cape Krio - point maximum penetration northern (distance in the flight line from the English base of Derna -from 240 km Benghazi 290 km).

Group "Zara" - Position 36° Lat. 27° Long. (Between Stampalia and Karpathos) Point maximum penetration East. Turnabout to meet in parallel columns with the Group “V. Veneto” in the area 35° 20' Lat. - 21° 70' Long.

The Day X + 2 was considered the most critical days of operation "Gaudo" since there was a stretch of sea between the 21° meridian - 36° parallel N (including up to 25° E) consists of a parallelogram of 160x370 km at the autonomy flight limits of X CA T., and the 4th Air Fleet, -which appeared dangerously unprotected from an effective and continuous air cover, a sector in which unfortunately manifested the naval action between Adm. Jachino’s Fleet and the M.F. of Adm. Cunningham.[246]

Cant 1007 Bis of the 95th Group BT (Maj. G. Morbidelli) in action against targets of the Peloponnese during the final offensive against Greece in the spring of 1941. Against Greece the RA participated in the offensive maximum extent of the whole war.



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Only the Aegean Aviation, using the Karpathos airfield for its CR.42 (greater flight range fitted - km 1000), could theoretically send some fighters into the open sea and with a range remaining of 15 - 20 minutes the morning of the most dangerous day.

This possibility had been anticipating and partly assessed at least for close exploration, with take off at dawn of 2 planes catapulted from the Naval Force, both to control the situation at sea and indicate the presence of enemy convoys at sea. The two Ro.43 had completed a mission to Cape Lero distance placed between the 360-380 km from ships, relying on their autonomy of 1100 km and 4 hours of flight. In the late afternoon, the Naval Force approaching to the point of autonomy limits of the Luftwaffe, it was to draw on for a short time the aircraft of X C.A.T.

The collaboration of the Luftwaffe, of course considering the pressures exerted by the Germans to carry out the raid, was very wide and preformed by sending a specialized radio communications unit embarked on the Italian ships, two officers of the X C.A.T. link They were aboard the "Veneto" for, coordinate cooperation and establish a, short course of recognition and identification by the X C.A. T., put in place the day X (27 March) when the Naval Force would surpass the Straits of Messina in the morning flew by German fighters and bombers in the afternoon; They were adopted signals and methods of recognition of Italian and English ships, in order to avoid identification misunderstandings.

Agreements between Supermarina and Superaereo (Document no. 1840 -25-3-41-XIX) were also prepared and gradually changed depending on the situation and needs, clarified to avoid misinterpretations, ie. armed reconnaissance X +2 on the 22° meridian, which Maj. pilot Fontana, Chief of Battle Fleet Air service, clarified to Adm. Jachino to be offensive formation to any enemy shipping (torpedo-bombers) and not attacks formations likely to protect Italian ships for which they were required fighter aircraft. Meetings were held with representatives of Supermarina and X C.A. T., involved in the operation, whether to make changes requested by the Navy, is to ensure perfect compliance of each of the parties concerned to the conduct of an operation. At the meeting the representatives of the X Flieger Korps took to rectify the information provided previously about the torpedoing by the Luftwaffe of 2 English B.B. which reduced the M.F. to one B.B.

The news was intended to resize the facts and avoid dangerous interpretations by Supermarina. A photographic survey carried out the 25th confirmed the presence in Alexandria 3 B.B. and 1 CV.

On this occasion it was stated that the Day X corresponded to 26 March, the X + 1-27 and X + 2 to 28. A copy of the agreed arrangements between Superaereo, X C.A.T. and Supermarina was transmitted by the latter through the Aegean Aviation Egeomil.

On the 26th the planned operational program was regularly performed. It was informed of the presence in Alexandria 3 BB., 2 CV., 1 CL., 11 DD., 60 ships. At Suda were detected 2 CL., 1 minesweeper, a dozen of ships and oil tankers in the bay.

The same night assault means of the Royal Navy attacked the English ships in Suda sinking l CA “York”, the tanker “Pericles” of 8324 GRT. and a big steamer. The 6 bold pilots, captured during the brilliant mission, were decorated with the M.O.v.m.

On the night the Naval Force gathered off Cape Spartivento Calabro with cruisers Divisions from Messina, Taranto, Brindisi and the morning of the 27th (X + 1) moving towards S.E. escorted by antisubmarine Cant.506 until sunset. The German heavy fighter formations not discovered shared the morning the Italian ships, and in the afternoon there were some erratic sightings.

The general weather conditions could not be considered good for the presence of fog, wind, reduced visibility and tense sea.

At 12:30 the Naval Force had been sighted and reported to the M.F. Command at Alexandria via Malta Navy.

The other planned missions took place regularly, with the exception of a survey of Alexandria, but the discovery at sea of the Italian Naval Force caused some measures by Adm. Cunningham including precautionary movements of vessels in Greek waters, a temporary suspension of traffic with the convoys, increased maritime surveillance by the Coastal Command and RAF. The Italian surprise was missing![247]

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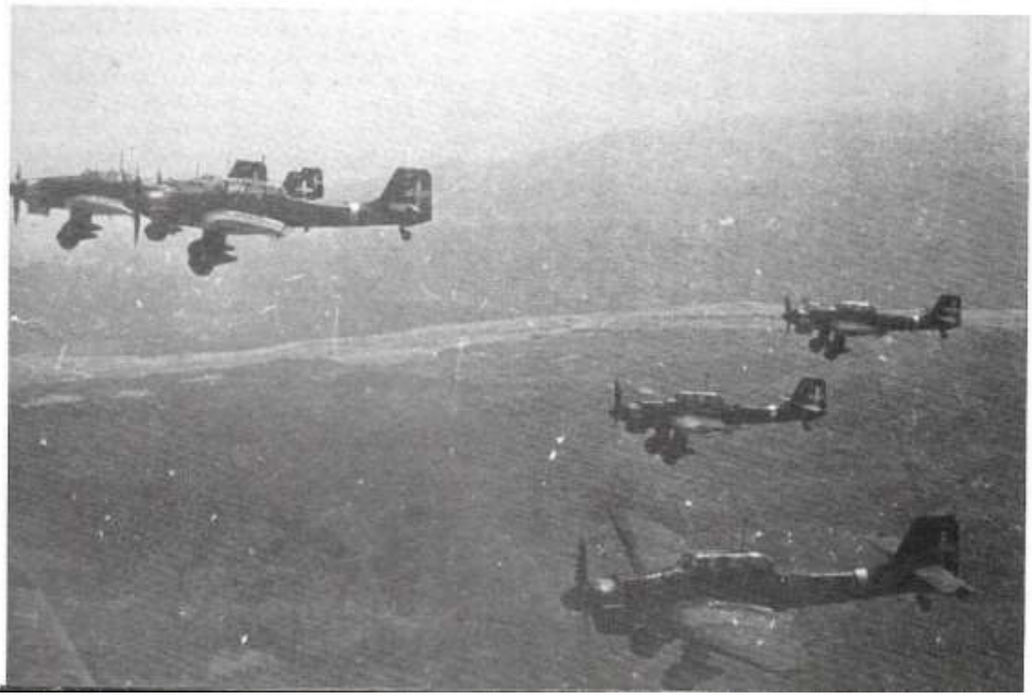
Bombing of enemy ships in Suda Bay by the 50th BT Group stationed in the Dodecanese. The German attack against Greece had the Aegean Italian air support that bombarded Piraeus and Crete.

Picchiatori of 208th Sqd BaT in direct flight to hit enemy positions on the Epirus war front. During the final offensive aviation contributed significantly to the G.U. tactical operations of the Army.



The same night the M.F. with 3 B.B., 1 C.V., 9 DD., left Alexandria; Adm. Jachino had no news of any changes to the program agreed in common, nor the important German denial about the alleged sinking of 2 enemy BB, because such innovations greatly diminished certain real and psychological safety margins equally necessary in the performance of the operation.

Among the rules issued by the M.F. Command, after the sighting of the Italian ships included: sending reinforcements to the F.A.A. torpedo squadrons on Crete and in Cyrenaica. Reconnaissance in the west of Crete and attacks by R.A.F. bombers, in the Dodecanese.

Explorations in the southern Ionian Sea, in the area in S.W. Aegean and south of Crete to start from the morning of the 28th.

The day X +2 (28 March) the Naval Force, had regularly reached the S.W. area established in Gaudo, after a Supermarina message had to cancel the mission planned for the ”Zara” Group to the N.E., of Crete. At 06:00 the "Vittorio Veneto" catapulted a Ro.43 that half an hour later sighted an enemy formation with 4 CL escorted by 4 DD. (Force B) commanded by Adm. V.A. Pridham-Wippel.

At 6:05 even the "Bolzano", catapulted a Ro.43 to explore the stretch of sea between Gaudo and Cerigotto while Ro.43 of the "Veneto" continued to send useful reports on the positions of the enemy ships and to 08:00 after a last message ran on to Rhodes touch down at 10:55 after a good five hours of uninterrupted and valuable service. The Ro.43 of the “Bolzano” not spotted anything and touching down instead at Leros at 10:20. At 08:00 also the "Abruzzi" launched a plane headed for the Force B where retained contact up to 09:15 and then flew to Rhodes at 12:10 hours.

The two naval formations composed of cruisers and DD, in equal numbers, are kept at a distance the British commander hesitating to commit because of the greater range: Italian ballistics of guns, so the Adm. Pridham-Wippel decided to attract the Italians cruisers to the naval fleet of Adm. Cunningham with 3 BB "Warspite", "Barham" and "Valiant" supported by CV. "Formidable" that since the dawn had launched some scouts looking for the Italian vessels sighted at 07:39. It was the 3rd Div. CA. (Trento, Bolzano, Trieste). Adm. Jachino did not fall into the trap, however, prepared by the British, who unaware of the presence of the "Vittorio Veneto" now reversed course, became more aggressive and closing in to get themselves into the trap set by the Italians that target them perhaps in advance with adjusted broadsides of forcing the battleship to a fast retreat.

Shortly after 09:00 Adm. Jachino had received a message from Rhodes that signaled the presence ascertained by aircraft of a naval formation in the same area in which sailed the Italian Naval Force and since it was evidently of the Italian ships, Jachino promptly signaled misidentification of the reconnaissance plane to avoid possible attacks of Axis planes. The British torpedo planes were targeted with anti-aircraft fire from the cruisers of Force B who had mistaken them mistakenly for Italian aircraft.

At 11:00 the presence of torpedo bombers like "Swordfish" clearly signaled the presence of an aircraft carrier and 15 minutes later 6 torpedo bombers made a attack on the Italian battleship, the launch of torpedoes dropped missing from a great distance due to the violent barrage shooting of Italian ships.

The planned escort programmed with CR.42 of Aegean Aviation had not been noticed by the Italian Naval Force as the first patrol took off from Karpathos at 6:25 was forced to return due to bad weather conditions encountered after 40 minutes of flight. Between the hours of 07:50 and 08:10 took off two more CR.42 patrols (were available 12 CR.42 of the 160th Sqd. C.T.) but even these patrols fell between 09:10 to 09:40 without having sighted the ships.

Luckiest last patrol took off at 08:45, which identified a gap between the clouds Italian ships flying over for half an hour between the hours 10:00 to 10:30, returning to Karpathos at 11:45 at end of autonomy. A last attempt made at 10:15 with the new take-off of the first match on patrol in the early morning and quickly replenished, did not cause any positive results in sightings and was part due to the end at 13:10 bringing to conclusion as intended in the planned escort service had seen the use of a total 21 CR.42.[248]

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The torpedo attack by the "Swordfish" on the "Vittorio Veneto" was partly thwarted by the intervention of a Ju.88 that paired with a similar plane had reached just before the Italian ships signaling the presence of the Force B a sighted short distance the bulk of the Mediterranean Fleet.

In the action a German twin-engine was shot down by the Fulmar escort to of naval torpedo bombers who took off, however, from a Crete Airport. The in vain, generous German intervention was greatly appreciated by Adm. Jachino.

At 12:30 Force B met with the bulk of the Mediterranean Fleet and continued to keep the navigation to the Italian Fleet.

The implementation of air protection program agreed between Supermarina, X C.A.T., and Superaereo had partial realization and undergone some changes.

The German air force had carried out the planned reconnaissance missions using Ju.88s, nine of which operated between 07:00 and 18:30 in the area SE of Sicily up to the north of Crete. One of these aircraft was lost as described in a clash with fighters embarked on the “Formidable”. The barrage cruises of the Bf. 109 carried around Malta between 08:30 to 19:00 hours. Lacking the expected direct protection with Bf. 110 because as agreed the position of vessels should not exceed 21° meridian, while at 07:00 the Naval Force was already at the height of the 24° meridian.

The Aegean Air Force in addition to the surveys provided for by Cant. 501-506 of R.M., strengthened the service by taking off at 05:00 a SM.79 and 2 Cant.506 to monitor the area north of Crete, while ignoring the time the cancellation of the "Zara" Group's mission. At 05:35 a scout SM.81 took off to explore the area south of Crete and at 05:50 the another similar aircraft flew over the Caso -Alexandria Channel. For purely offensive aspect (armed reconnaissance) departed at 08:42 two SM. 79 torpedo bombers of the 281st Sqd. The results of this preliminary stage were the alleged sighting of enemy ships at 7:45 by a SM.81 sent south of Crete, later identified instead for national, while the other reconnaissance aircraft and torpedo bombers did not provide information on loss of sightings except 2 SM.79 - Capt. pilot. Buscaglia - Osservatore Lt. Castagnacci and gregarious Lt. Pilot Greco -which sighted the M.F. at 12:15 hours and attacked the enemy ships unsuccessful. The discovery signal was, however, inexplicably sent to Egeomil only at 14:25 hours.

A third torpedo bomber of the 34th BT/AS Group took off at 15:45 and attacked an escorted convoy sighted at 17:30 and attempted to torpedo the escorting cruiser. At 6:55 another 2 SM.79 bombers reinforced the scout operating south of Crete but the inclement weather advised at 08:15 on their return, however, be replaced by another 2 bombers that led to the end the mission regularly due to the end, and no outcome. At 07:30 in the reconnaissance mission on the route Cape-Alexandria returned not replaced by another aircraft until at 09:35 and resumed at 10:30 third reconnaissance mission continuity that extended into better visibility up at 15:40 with the return to Gadurrà of the aircraft.

A bombing mission on the airfield of Heraklion with 4 SM.79 of the 34th Group was suspended for bad weather.

Meanwhile the Naval Force of Adm. Jachino having completed the formal aspect of the operation "Gaudo” while impaired by a number of unexpected events, was sailing to be within the national waters from which it was near about 450 miles measured from the base of Taranto, totaling 15 hours of sailing with speed slightly lower than the maximum that could develop the "Vittorio Veneto” (31 knots).

At 12:30 a German scout signaled again Adm. Jachino the presence of Force B. At 14:30 the "Vittorio Veneto" suffered a series of attacks by bombers at high altitude which were extended until at 15:40. No damage due to the shot dispersion. Other attacks were directed to the 3rd Div. cruisers but fortunately to no avail by three “Swordfish” taking off from the airfield of Maleme (Crete).

At 15:19 torpedo bombers, bomb, were at altitude and fighters attacking the "Veneto" and the DD escort. A "Swordfish" launches its weapon from a thousand meters before being shot down by A/A fire of the battleship which remained to hit by the torpedo which damages the wheel and stops the pump for block machines. The ship embarks about 4000 tons of water but holds well enough to maneuver and stability while returned to motion the engines but allow only a speed up to 20 knots (36 km/h).[249]

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The distance from Taranto is about 420 miles (680 km). The average speed of Naval Force is unified. The air strike on the Vittorio Veneto was coordinated with 2 bombers at high altitude, one dive bomber and three torpedo planes with simultaneous attacks on both sides of the ship.

One «Swordfish» deliberately sacrificed itself by moving within firing range of the AA machine guns, was hit, released the torpedo and crashed into the sea.

The torpedo hit the Italian battleship aft!

Had participated in the attacks FAA Squadrons 803rd, 806th, 826th and 829th boarded on the CV as well as some "Swordfish" of the FAA 815th Sqdn. based at Maleme (Crete).

At 16:00 a German reconnaissance plane reported the presence of the M.F. 170 miles S-SE of the "Vittorio Veneto" and simultaneously a signal of X C.A.T., warned takeoff at 14:30 of 4 Bf.110 posted for the escort to the Naval Force, approaching the fateful 21° meridian. Unfortunately, 4 twin-engine heavy fighters they could not find the naval formation and Adm. Jachino instructed the CAT to send new heavy fighters as being located at 35° 10' Lat - 21° 40' Long., receiving confirmation at 16:35 hours the start of a new patrol for escort and protection. But even this new particularly acute and urgent action did not cause any positive results and the ships were not spotted by Italian or German planes.

Certainly the presence of friendly aircraft in the skies of the F.N. could have provided a reassuring reason, albeit relative, for the commander of the Italian Squadron, but in this regard it is worth specifying that such an eventuality could not constitute a guarantee to the desired extent nor a reason for operational safety, considering the type of aircraft available, its handling, its technical characteristics and armament. The narrow margin of autonomy that the CR.42s of the Aegean possessed put the pilots in precarious moral conditions in the event of combat, since an unforeseen delay would have irreversibly compromised the return to Scarpanto, with the not at all reassuring prospect of falling into the sea or being taken prisoner on Crete.

The characteristics of the Fairey «Fulmar» of the «Formidable», with a speed of 430 km/h, 8 machine guns as armament and a range of 1300 km could be considered on average superior in terms of armament and range to the CR.42, while maintaining approximately the same speed and could validly oppose in terms of handling and armament the Bf.110 and Ju.88 assigned to the escort of the F.N.

In the opposite camp, even though objectively evaluating the reactive ability of "Formidable" who possessed twenty “Fulmar” for the direct defense, it was not possible to prevent the attack on the British aircraft carrier torpedo bombers of the 281st Sqd. who dropped their torpedoes from a short distance just missing the ship. A tangible and clear demonstration that surprise and optimal conditions can sometimes prevail on distraction, on the number, on the capacity, on the opponent's ability.

In the afternoon the sky had brightened considerably and banks of clouds in the morning they had greatly hindered the visibility and Italian-German aircraft identification, but now searching and facilitated the sighting of the Italian ships with the intensified aerial exploration Adm. Cunningham had ordered to have accurate and up to date news on the position of the Italian fleet.

A “Sunderland” scout departed from Suda (Crete) over took the Italian naval formations and to start from 16:00 beginning to send clear messages on position, composition, type of ship, integrated navigation route a little later by two float planes catapulted from the "Warspite". At 15:30 the X CAT had made take off another 10 twin-engine Messerschmitt as a result of pressures from Supermarina concerned by the evolution of the situation, aircraft reached the naval formation after about 1 hour 30' of flight persisted protection in the sky for about 1 hour even when they had to terminate the service due to the end and at 19:30 back to Grottaglie.

After 17:30 the Italian ships began to take a night security formation to protect the "Vittorio Veneto", having the cryptographic service aboard that had done an extraordinary interpretation of the enemy messages, picked up a communication H.Q. Mediterranean Fleet in Alexandria, which was coordinating with various naval commands the air attacks to be carried out at sunset departing from Maleme and the “Formidable”.

At 18:10 the naval fleet had neither, nor could have more until the next day aerial escort and sailed with route 323° in the direction of Taranto at a reduced speed of 15 knots.[250]

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Tirana airport aerial view with a major deployment of more than a hundred aircraft R.A. They notice with notable works made Italian air force in just over two years with slopes, hangars, equipment, warehouses.

At 18:23 on the horizon they appeared the first British torpedo bombers but were kept at a safe distance pending the most auspicious hour for the attack.

A radio message of Adm. Jachino directed to the X C.A.T., for a further escort to ships before dusk could not be implemented due to the incipient darkness (sun sunset 18:50 hours). At 19:20 the DD. tail began to emit smoke screens to decrease the visibility, followed 20 minutes later by other destroyers.

At 19:30 began the aerial attack in a violent barrage that knocked down a torpedo plane hit from the DD. "Bersagliere".

The attack, which lasted about twenty minutes, caused the damage to the cruiser "Pola" by torpedo struck and remained immobilized for damage to the engines and to the helm.

The generous but risky plan to bring aid to the stricken ship by reversing course the 1st Div. Cruisers and operating methods and tactics that flowed from that intention, are the base of Cape Matapan tragedy that led to the sinking of the cruisers “Zara”, "Fiume", the same "Pola" and DD. "Alfieri" and "Carducci" with the death of more than 3000 sailors of the 1st Div. Cruisers.

In addition to inexplicable mistakes made, combined to produce and expand the disaster some negative circumstances: the simultaneous arrival in the area where there was the "Pola" the Italian cruisers and battleships of the MF, the random sighting with optical equipment of Italian ships from the opposite direction to the side the guns of English battleships pointed, the unexpected presence of British ships in a deemed sufficiently distant from the MF area and then still relatively safe. To this he adds later the British had no credit to detect and localize the Italian ships since Adm. Cunningham said mistaken for presumption route, distance, speed: three fundamental elements in naval warfare, however, cleverly exploiting the incredible opportunity that presented itself before the lookouts with binoculars watching the Italian ships were heading unsuspecting under the fire of the big guns of the Mediterranean Fleet.[251]

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Commander of Albania Fighters Gen. BA Arrigo Tessari assist take-off of the aircraft 24th Group CT Aut. directed at war missions in enemy territory. The Italian air force had always been the domain of heaven during the war with Greece / Yugoslavia.

Before the tragedy at Cape Matapan, Admiral Jachino had requested air support from Supermarina for the 29th consisting of a fighter escort from dawn for the F.N. and the 1st Cruiser Div. including the « Pola » in the estimated position where the immobilized ship was located and also to request the departure of the 10th Desdtroyer Sqd. during the night to support the Cruiser Div.

The first aircraft - 5 Ju.88 - arrived on the sky of the Naval Force, at 06:20 hours of the 29th followed later by Italian and German fighters and for the entire navigation in the Gulf of Taranto ships were escorted by 45 bombers, 6 torpedo planes and 53 Italian fighter (Air Force Sicily/ the 4th Air Fleet) and 19 Ju.88 with the Bf.110 of the X CAT, which accompanied the Battle Fleet to Taranto where it arrived at 15:40 hours of 29 March.

The castaways of the 1st Div. were recovered in part by British and Greek (1302 between officers, non-commissioned officers and sailors), 160 from the hospital ship "Gradisca" over 3000 disappeared forever in the Mediterranean.

AERIAL ATTACK ON THE MEDITERRANEAN FLEET

From the first light of the 29th, maritime reconnaissance aircraft departing from Taranto sighted and followed the M.F. for hours, reporting composition, course, speed. The reconnaissance aircraft also took care of specifying the area of the collision and the hundreds of shipwrecked people wandering on the sea.

At 11:00 two reconnaissance Ju.88 sighted the M.F. sailing toward Alexandria. The twin-engine Germans were attacked by fighters boarded on the aircraft carrier, but also maintained the contact until the arrival of the bombers called by radio.

The Luftwaffe effected some attacks with Ju.88 of III/KG.30 directed particularly against the "Formidable" with defense from the “Fulmar” that brought down a German twin-engine. Some attacks were unleashed in the morning as a result of the abandonment of the rescue operation of castaways by Greek and English DDs. In the afternoon 2 torpedo bombers of the 279th Sqd. departed from Catania (Capt. Bernardini -Lt. Oss. Baffigo and Lt. Guza with 2nd Lt. Oss. Inzerillo) attacked two DDs. in the Eastern Mediterranean made the target of violent A/A fire, which damaged the two tri-motors.[252]

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A gunner RAF captured after descending by parachute following the felling of his Blenheim, is healed from an injury suffered during the fight with the Italian fighter (Sgt. Perna).

There were no other attacks during the day of the 29th for the M.F. but it was attacked the next day by two Italian submarines "Dagabur" (T.V. D. Romano) and "Ambra" (T.V. M. Arillo), which struck first and then latter sank the CL. "Bonaventure" and with that sinking "Operation Gaudo" finally ended.

The disastrous result of the Italian raid into the Eastern Mediterranean, emerges such a bitter account: failure again in 1941 of the collaboration between the Italian Armed Forces - Navy and Air Force in the primary position - which it is to be added in addition, the inexperience of the Luftwaffe, the rest understood and justified, to cooperate in air and naval operations in the Mediterranean with the Italian Navy, had never occurred until then.

Objectively analyze the causes and effects of the ill-fated operation "Gaudo".

The insistence of the German navy to Supermarina to undertake naval actions against the British trafficking of convoys to and from Greece using fast battleships escorted by cruisers & DDs, it was accepted with considerable reluctance by the Italian Navy convinced that the Mediterranean was very different from the course of the war in the Atlantic and when the operation was finally determined, the idea did not find enough high-level support (Supermarina) than it he had in compensation from the Command of the Naval Battle Fleet. Supermarina heartedly followed the preparation of the mission, the Stamage casually made acquaintance.

The operation was prepared hastily and planned overall inadequately and under certain superficial aspects:

a) it was not held due importance in the existing danger zone between 21° -36° meridian parallel where Naval Force would be without any air support for at least 4-5 hours of sailing, hoping more than believing, to be able independently to solve this period of danger relying only on its own capacities and possibilities, and perhaps this possibility might become reality if the unfortunate torpedoing of the "Vittorio Veneto" first and the "Pola", later, had changed irreversibly the situation;[253]

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The CR 42 Commander Pratelli (150th Group CT Aut.) recognizable to end white cross is preparing to take off for a mission against targets Yugoslav conflict early April 1941.

b) Aviation cooperation to start on day X (March 26), rushed and planned in 2-3 days of consultations, however, could guarantee an extent however, more and more decreasing, that is, that the Naval Force walked away from the aerial, national foundations, remote and close protection of the ships, but certainly could not prevent similar activity by the opposing party, carried out first with reconnaissance aircraft and later with embarked or ground-based aircraft (Cyrenaica -Crete);

c) the hasty basted cooperation between command Naval Force and X Flieger Korps. (On which perhaps became over-reliance) certainly did not prevent the Luftwaffe to participate with presence, vigor and generosity in the operation, but there still remains the finding clear, that from the first day of the operation the Germans aircraft failed to spot the Italian ships at sea just to the east of Sicily, and sightings in the days -27 and 28 - were discontinuous and provided only a modest contribution in the transactions, the information had to be received by the commander of the Naval Force - were insufficient probably due to the poor visibility, the layered clouds, no perfect weather conditions. Aircraft- missions employed: n. 45;

d) Also applies for the work done by the scouts, bombers and fighters of Aegean Aviation albeit used in slightly higher number of 54 aircraft-mission;

e) the large number of catapult capable scouts available to the Naval Force (Not less than 20 Ro.43) it could and should be used instead to the fullest extent possible, and to provide for commander at sea all that information that had not been possible to implement the Aegean reconnaissance and X C.A.T. is exploiting rationally the most critical period that possibility, however, guaranteed by the excellent results had the morning with Ro.43 catapulted and substantial autonomy of the small but - useful embarked seaplanes. To this add after non-use, as a last resort, the Ro.43 well as fighter in hindering at dusk the presence of "Swordfish" is not escorted by exploiting the 2 machine guns of 7.7 against the only the traversable weapon of the Fairey aircraft and using the higher speed (km/h 300) and handling against the 220 km/h of the awkward English aircraft.[254]

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f) Aerial protection - a distance and close - not was strangely taken into consider the possibility of transferring the airfields of the Aegean a number of bombers of the 4th Air Fleet (in Pugrie were available 11 bomber groups with between 180 SM.79, BR 20, Cant. 1007, Ju.87) as compared to 34 aircraft potentially available on the Dodcanneso airfields , nor such an eventuality was proposed and extended to the X CAT units, which had in Sicily of KG.4th, 26th, 30th, and LG.1 bomber with at least a hundred of He.111 and Ju.88. It was to implement a temporary transfer and exceptional time-limited action, but that would take a series of incalculable benefits to the transaction; through the presence of Bf.110 be deployed in Karpathos you could eliminate or reduce the "rectangle of death" in N.W. Crete and hit heavily with bombers and torpedo planes and determining the M.F. as actually occurred exactly two months later in the battle for Crete, transferring part of X Flieger Korps to Greece, Bf.109 and Ju.87 units to Scapanto that decimated the Mediterranean Fleet;

g) the operation itself and for the purposes it was intended, did not show any strategic interest, since it excluded *a priori* a naval battle of great importance with the Mediterranean Fleet.

Tactically it was subject to the possibility of finding the alleged enemy convoy routes at sea, this possibility inconsistent and confined now, at the time, to luck excessively vague elements that are taken into account in modern warfare.

Essentially a costly and dangerous movement of ships, a great deal of fuel oil, aircraft, personnel in exchange for an event that might not occur, as it turned into reality with the aggravating notes mentioned.

Two months later it was the turn of Germany to implement the same sea a series of air action against the M.F., but in different circumstances and in the changed operating conditions.

But at the time operational planning of “Merkur” was made entirely by the Luftwaffe, it came to defending the prestige of the Reich and the life of German paratroopers. Nevertheless, the German command did not commensurate to request the support of the Italian Navy and the Italian Air Force Aegean collaboration when events took a turn for the worse.[255]

The Chief of Staff/RA Gen. Pricolo attend the final phase of the offensive against Greece attending takeoffs and arrivals of the fighters of the 22nd Group CT Aut. also committed against Yugoslavia Near Gen Ranza, Gen. Sozzani, Col Commander Nannini of the Bombers of Albania.

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Meeting between Gen Rossi (XXV C Army) and the Gruppenführer SS Sepp Dietrich commander Leibstandarte "Adolf Hiller" SS Pz. Div. Who had bypassed the Greek Epirus positions ahead of the Italian unit in the final offensive.

A number of elements that it was necessary to evaluate fully analyze and to safeguard the prestige of Italian arms and the precious lives of sailors.

The disastrous outcome of the ambush at Matapan and the careful analysis of the failed mission, the detailed study of the radio interceptions and the deciphered clear messages, convinced Supermarina that some of the detections made by the English during the tragic night had their origin and validity in the use of radiotelemetry equipment and in this belief they arrived at the certainty that the Royal Navy had been equipped with radiolocators for night-time sighting (the « Pola » was discovered by radar - Editor's note).

This apparatus was not unknown to the Italian Navy which had for some years in the evaluation of the specimens, but that certain entrenched and existing personal beliefs at the General Staff of the Royal Navy, shared also by the higher command at sea, it was considered ineffective and certainly less accurate rangefinder to coincide with whom - were equipped the largest ships of the Battle Fleet. In addition to the unpreparedness for night shooting which was one of the most delicate patterns of reduced operational efficiency of the Italian Navy, greatly limiting its use in certain hours and only with the use of special visual devices, it had resulted in the birth of a widespread mentality tactic which excluded the hypothesis and consequently a certain lack of interest in the "radio detector range finder" - as Italian radar was originally called - the use of which was supposed to be mainly at night to assist the action of the large naval guns.

It was necessary to run for cover urgently!

In April it was positively tested on R.N. "Carini" the GDR EC.3Bis (range 12 km Naval 34 k/m air) and began the transformation into aircraft carriers of two large passenger liners.[256]

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The attack on Yugoslavia and Greece, "Operation Marita" (6 April /30 April 1941)

Italian-German meeting held in Salzburg between the Fuhrer and the Minister Ciano, Germany planned to solve the Balkan problem in March 1941 through a plan drawn up by the OKW and conventionally called "Marita" Übung*. Resulted from the Fuhrer Directive n.20 of 12/13/1940 to face the Italian initiative, the plan called for a German attack on Greece through Bulgaria, who has been adhering to the Tripartite Pact would become in effect been effective and active and as such would allow the passage of German troops through the Balkan route Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria. The operation "Marita" was definitely solve the Italian-Greek latent conflict for too long and thereby ensure strategic positions to the Reich in the Eastern Mediterranean, with the possession of the important strategic island of Crete, creating the necessary conditions to allow the Axis more large offensive actions against England in the Middle East and the Suez Canal, expand into better political relations with neutral Turkey linking Germanic diplomacy to a pact of friendship with Bulgaria signed in February 1941 to raise awareness with the prudent preparation restless Arab people intolerant of the Anglo-French domination: a range of perspectives abroad and vast and unpredictable strategic-policy measures, military.

The severe lesson Mussolini suffered by the Italian attack on Greece and the upheavals that followed the military reverses they were derived at the Stamage and Higher Commands of the Italian Armed Forces, had prudently advised the Duce and reflecting the new Chief of the G.S.G, to introduce more frequent and fruitful service relations with the OKW to agree on a basis of understanding the new plans of cooperation, entered into a broader technical, scientific, and with mutual exchanges of military supplies raw materials and industrial products.

It was hoped in this way to overcome misunderstandings and differences surfaced in the past, coordinate productive efforts, unify procedures and armament, especially needed for the Italian Armed Forces, in order to amalgamate interests and strategic visions and the Axis Tripartite Pact in Europe and North Africa.

This now felt and felt need, the overcoming of the crisis now in place on the Greek front, as opposed to the negative trend of military operations in Libya that he had created a new and more serious military crisis than that of November in December 1940, convinced Mussolini pressed this time by the new Chief of G.S.G and the GS/Army, to meet again with Hitler to discuss on what basis it was possible to accept military aid several times offered from Germany and obtain military equipment for adapting the war effort - in Italy directly or indirectly - cooperating side by side on the battlefield in a renewed spirit of cooperation that could not only have ideological and political aspects as in the past.[257]

*Operation Mercury

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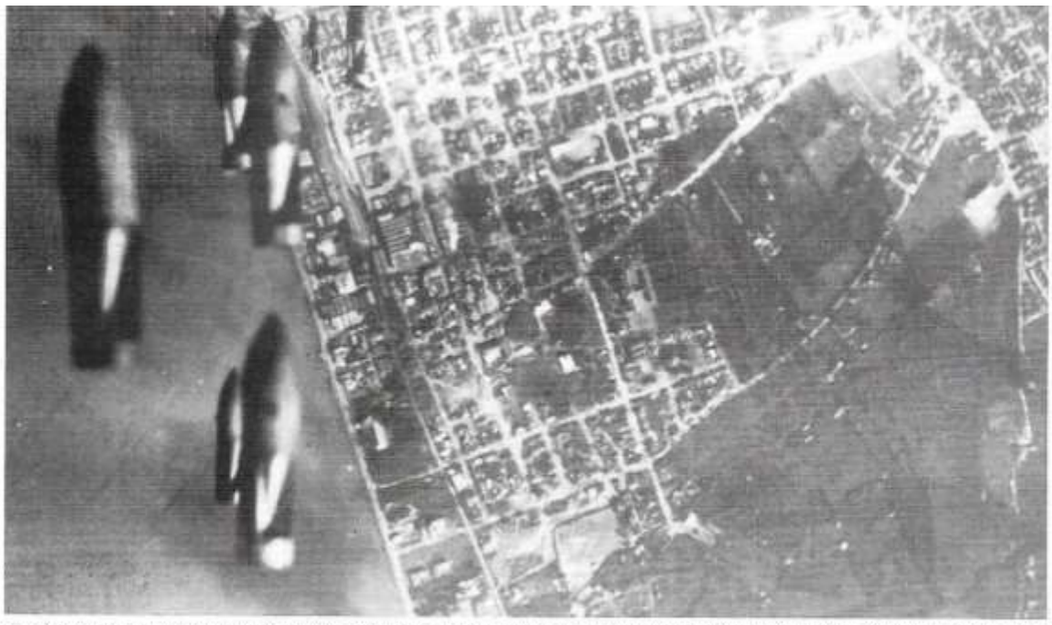

Bombing of military targets (railway and port) to Salunicco. In conjunction with the Italian offensive also Germany, effecting the operation of attack against Greece ("Marita" Operation) that was to lead to the end of the war.

It had therefore come to the first "*redde rationem*"* in the history of the Axis, but it had been necessary undergo military defeats and humiliations for abandoning political conceit, haughtiness, arrogance and noted bitterly doctrinaire and technical unpreparedness, superficiality, and deficiencies failure at every training level of the Italian Armed Forces.

The meeting between the two leaders took place on 19-20 January 1941 in Berchtesgaden in the Bavarian Alps, and took place at the same time when the fortress of Tobruk besieged for several days by the British was capitulating.

Also had been lost in Kassala in E.A. for the new British offensive and Greek War Front stagnated in the mountains tenaciously held by Italian soldiers: a psychologically negative moment for Italy that affected even more the meeting by urging the need to ask for help and military cooperation of the German ally.

Totally different instead was the German position; decisive and secure the Reich political action, any vacillation at OKW summit, slow and methodical diplomatic action in the Balkans to aggregate the Tripartite all the nations of Southeast Europe prelude to "Operation Barbarossa" now well in preparation. For 9 days the military aircraft of the X Flieger Korps they were operating in the Mediterranean from the Sicilian and Libyan bases, had attacked ships and military targets in Malta, carried out reconnaissance and mine-laying on the Suez Canal and Egypt. Attended important meeting as well as Hitler and Mussolini, the Field Marshal Keitel, Chief of the OKW, Gen. Jod Chief OKW operations service, Gen. Guzzoni Deputy Chief of the G.S.G with their aides and collaborators.

For Italy, Gen. Guzzoni held the presentation, objectively illustrated the existing military situation at the time in North Africa and Eastern Europe, in Albania and the Dodecanese; Guzzoni prospected some Italian solutions about the German intervention in Libya and Albania and on this basis developed the subsequent discussion with the participation of German representatives.[258]

*in Italian a idiom for showdown

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The agreements reached were the following: Albania sending a German Alpine Corps (I Gebirge Korps) with 36,000 men between Alpine and mountain fighters, 900 draft animals, 400 vehicles reinforced with special support units; *Libya*: sending a light motorized division trained specifically for use against armored vehicles with 9300 men, 2000 vehicles, 70 armored vehicles, 111 field and self-propelled guns, 56 anti-tank and anti-aircraft cannons.

Strengthening of the X Fl. Kps by sending other units sufficiently to transfer to Libya as an air detachment for direct tactical support of ground units, which would have arrived in the spring - consisting of an Army Corps of two divisions and special units (Panzer Korps Afrika) with 45,000 men, 450 tanks, 320 field and heavy cannons, 240 anti-tank guns, 160 anti-aircraft guns, 8,500 vehicles.

In the E.A. sector it was decided a resistance to the bitter end on particularly suitable positions for defense.

For the Dodecanese, the situation was rather better and it was hoped sending Stukas units for the excellent possibilities that were offered in the Aegean with the British fleet attacks at sea between Greece and Egypt.

Against France was confirmed a cautious attitude and excluded in any occupation of the rest of the national and African territory under the jurisdiction of the Vichy government.

As military materials the Italian request was limited to the surprise of the Germans, a modest supply of ammunition for auto cannons of 20 and 37 mm. and hand grenades, providing that for the forthcoming details was given to Gen. Efisio Marras military attaché in Berlin.

After the military conference between representatives of the Stamage and OKW, there was the exposure of the situation according to the mind of the Führer which can be summed up:

1) Sending German forces in Romania to offer additional guarantees to the governments in Bucharest and Sofia.

2) Strengthening Flak and the Luftwaffe in the Balkans to protect the Romanian oil fields from possible RAF raids that according to information gleaned from Abwehr, was receiving from the US modern bombers with autonomy of 4000 km then able to operate from Greek bases and Crete.

3) Constitution a special army for the attack on Greece.

4) Potential danger to the Reich represented by the USSR and conviction for Germany to remain vigilant and ready on its eastern borders.

5) The need for the Luftwaffe to gain air supremacy in the struggle against England, decisive confrontation was only shelved but not abandoned.

6) Alive hopes in the Spanish attitude to facilitate a possible German attack on Gibraltar and personal belief in the non-intervention of the United States to a conflict in Europe. On the use of German divisions in Libya, the Fuhrer said certain that their action specifically in the anti-tank defensive and particularly effective in the offensive, would be of great help to the Italian unit by solving a difficult psychological problem arose in the Italian soldiers found the inability to destroy the British armored units. The Fuhrer also expressed some doubts about the opportunity due to the negative moment in which the German units would have been employed in Libya with the front in retreat and asked, in return, the Italian leaders to maintain the Derna-Mechili defensive line indefinitely, which was of extraordinary importance for the outcome of the fight in Cyrenaica.

The conference ended in Berchtesgaden, in a better and more promising atmosphere of understanding and in a climate of renewed confidence than most negative and oppressive held in Florence, Innsbruck, Salzburg even though the outcome of the results found, meant for Italy and especially for Mussolini and the General Staff, the Italian of the implicit admission inability to solve independently and, the war positively by its own means, their conceptual possibilities, military, technical and industrial. The conference in Berchtesgaden also highlighted for the first time since the war that the Axis powers were on the right track to fully exploit the politico-military alliance in all its aspects. It only remained to apply it with consistency, loyalty, harmony.

THE OPERATION "MARITA"

The OKW plan for the attack on Greece when they had practical application, revealed aspects and such dimensions before which emerges individually the belief that the Italian in October despite its linear ratio together appeared simply absurd, modest and unrealizable.[259]

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Prepared now when Greece was totally engaged with Italy, had suffered heavy losses in men and equipment, and felt threatened at the border with Macedonia, Bulgaria, the Operation "Marita" provided early spring the participation and employment the 12th Army of the Heere with 4 Korps with 21 divisions (the Italian started in full autumn was set at just 5 infantry divisions. Author's Note).

Would participate: 8 Inf. Div., 3 Alpine Div., 5 Panzer Div., 5 Motorized Div. including 2 of the Waffen SS. under the command of Field Marshal Wilhelm von List, who from Bulgaria had to attack in the direction of Vevi-Florina to reach behind the Greek deployment on the Albanian border, penetrate, still pointing in Macedonia to the border with Turkey and then move on Salonika and then proceed on Route Trikkala-Larissa-Corinto of Athens and the southern Peloponnesus area.

It was planned a meeting between German troops and the Italian in Epirus-Thessaly sector after the breakthrough of the front of the Albanian border, in conjunction with the Italian spring offensive of the 9th and 11th Army the command of General Cavallero.

The director of advanced to the Italian troops had been set in Epirus first and then through the Patras until the Peloponnesus where it was to make the second "rendezvous" with the German units.

This was roughly Operation "Marita" scheduled for the attack on Greece by the Ober Kommand der Deutschen Werhmacht (OKW).

But some events had to modify and later alter the German plan. Following them chronologically:

On 1 March 1941, the Head of the Bulgarian government Filoff signed in Vienna the total and definitive accession of Bulgaria to the Tripartite Pact and the same day the execution of agreements established previously, motorized Germanic troops were over and above the Bulgarian border from Romania.

With these movements was guaranteed the Bulgarian territorial integrity by any threatening and Anglo-Hellenic due to the recurrence of nationalist demands in Sofia against minorities dwelling built in Bulgarian Macedonia for years in the Greek and Yugoslav territory. Is facilitated at the same time with these events, the pressure of the Reich on Yugoslavia, the only country left out of the Balkan Tripartite. The presence of German and Hungarian troops in the north, northeast, and German-Romanian-Bulgarian southeast of the former Yugoslavia, he advised those responsible for the Zvetkovic government to establish a policy of rapprochement and friendship towards the Reich and its allies with a series of talks held in Germany which was attended besides the Chairman Zetkovic, the Foreign Minister Markovic, who negotiated the accession of their country to the Tripartite Pact, this formalized membership in Vienna on March 25, 1941 with the consent of Prince regent Paul of Yugoslavia.

Two days later a *coup* carried out by the military with the support of the young King Peter II who had supplanted the authority of the ruler, overthrew by force the government Zvetkovic replaced by Gen. Simovic Chief of the Air Force G.S. harbored pro-British sentiments as the young king. The Simovic government lay down immediately its policy function clearly hostile to Germany by ordering a general mobilization of reservists, signing a treaty of friendship and non-aggression with the USSR which had immediately officially met the new Yugoslav government.

All these irritating events of great importance in the Balkans and the consequences of such significant signs provocative worried not just Germany arousing the anger of the Fuhrer intent on the preparation of "Barbarossa", also threw alarmism alive in Italy and in the countries of the Tripartite Pact, created grounds further potential danger to the USSR interference in the Balkans after the forced territorial concessions in Dobruja and Bukovina by the Romanian side. The chances of an imminent conflict with Yugoslavia again threatened territorial claims on Italy's Dalmatia, Hungary on Vojvodina, Bulgaria on the southern Macedonia, Germany on ethnic minorities in the Slavic Styria.

The abrupt about-face by Yugoslavia also called into question once again the security in the Balkans that Germany had been seeking so much with patient understandings, agreements and alliances and openly encouraged the Soviet Union to adopt a provocative attitude in the Reich's zones of influence, a policy of the USSR that the Fuhrer was trying to neutralize once and for all after issuing Directive No. 21 (*Unternheman Rotbarbe*) which in the conventional language of the OKW meant an attack on the Soviet Union.[260]

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Feverish consultations for the Belgrade events followed one another in the following days between the German, Italian, Hungarian, Romanian and Bulgarian. On April 6, in a joint declaration of the member countries of the Tripartite Pact, the policy initiated by Yugoslavia was brought officially to the world public knowledge through a statement denouncing the manifest hostility of the Yugoslav government, the accession to the arbitrary cancellation Yugoslav tripartite Pact, the dull aversion to any pro German alliance.

At the same time was issued of the joint statement began military operations against Yugoslavia.

From multiple directions: Austria, eastern Italy, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, the troops of the Tripartite began the attack by taking part in operations in the north of the country with the German 2nd Army (Gen. Maximilian Weichs) with 9 divisions between infantry and mechanized, units of the Hungarian Honved with 8 infantry and cavalry divisions; Northwest Italian 2nd Army (Gen. Victor Ambrosio) with 14 Divisions - of which 3 Quick and a Armored; to the east and southeast to the 12th Army (Von List) reinforced with a Bulgarian division, south 6 divisions and two Italian groups assigned by Superalba and finally to the west, isolated in Yugoslavia, the small garrison of Zadar with a garrison comparable as an entity related to the actual division.

Overall, the Tripartite fielded against Yugoslavia least 46 divisions of which 15 German, 23 Italian, 8 Hungarian, 1 Bulgarian.

The air support would be provided by the 4th Luftflotte (Gen. Alexander Lohr) divided into the VIII Flieger Korps (Gen. Wolfram von Richthofen) with 800 combat aircraft (Stukas, bombers, fighters, destroyers), units of the X Flieger Korps (Gen. Hans Geisler) consisting of bombers and Stukas reinforced by fighters for 250 aircraft, tactical support and aerial observation, the XI Flieger Korps (Gen. Kurt Student) with the 7th Fallschirmjäger Div. reinforced by a Sturm Regiment. (Regt. of Airborne assault with gliders) and 2 of Transport Gesehwadern with 5 squadrons totaling 530 Ju.52, 120 gliders DFS 230, special units of the Luftlande Corps (aviation transported). Among the units of the Luftwaffe made its debut a Motorized Brigade of the “H. Goering" Division a special terrestrial use unit consisting of paratroopers and armored aviation grenadiers under the direct command of the Reich Marshal.

Facing the armies of the Axis the Royal Yugoslav Army strength of 30 divisions infantry, cavalry and motorized, divided into 9 Armies with a total of 1600,000 men under arms, being general mobilization to achieve the actual 2.3 million soldiers, the maximum ceiling foreseen in case of war; the Navy had 1 light cruiser, 6 DDs., 12 torpedo boats, 2 motor torpedo boats, support and auxiliary vessels. The Royal Yugoslav Air Force had three brigades with 8 Air Regiments of the line, 12 squadrons for naval aviation and scout flight units, school, training, connections.

A total of 800 aircraft of all types of which at least 60 percent of advanced modern concepts, with excellent operational features, including some models even superior technically and operationally the best Italian aircraft. Take for example Hawker "Hurricane" and the Messerschmitt Bf109/E in fighters; Bristol "Blenheim", Dornier D.17 and SIAI SM79 for the bombing.

The tasks assigned by the OKW to the 4th Luftflotte foresaw the achievement of the following objectives designated in order of priority:

1) Annihilation Yugoslav air force on the ground, preventing them any activity.

2) Destruction of Belgrade - the seat of government and Q.G. of the Armed Forces Yugoslav - to paralyze any political and military action.

3) Destruction military and industrial facilities, supply centers.

4) Tactical support to the army during operations.

5) Attack the lines of railway and road communications, to commands and military objectives.

The core of the 4th Luftflotte was represented by powerful VIII Fl. Kps. whose action was to create the so-called "Schwerpunkt" ie the crucial point of force intended to overwhelm the entire military situation with a mass action, it continued and traumatizing that was to produce the desired result before the blow that was to unleash the army with its panzer divisions: a tactical-strategic concept increasingly used successfully in the Blitz Krieg.[261]

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The starting locations for the VIII Fl.Kps. were airports of Sofia, Plovdiv, Arad, Deta, Szeged, Titel on which bombers and destroyers were concentrated with Stukas and fighters spread over advanced airfields.

Other units were arranged around Vienna (bomber and reconnaissance) and Graz (Stukas, fighters, destroyers).

The “Richtofen" Corps attack began shortly after 06:00 am of Sunday, April 6th, 1941!

Came the attack on the airports of Ljubljana, Zagreb, Marburg, Brezice, Cerckeje, Bos Gradiska, Novi Sad, Belgrade-Zemun, Andrijevisch, Pecs, Subotica, Vrozevac, Bijelina, Ruma, Sarajevo, Mostar, Banja Luka, Tuzla everywhere facilitieswere affected and the ground crippled with surprise.

Some fighting took place in the Belgrade sky between German and Yugoslavian Messerschmitt (specimens of the “Emil” series).

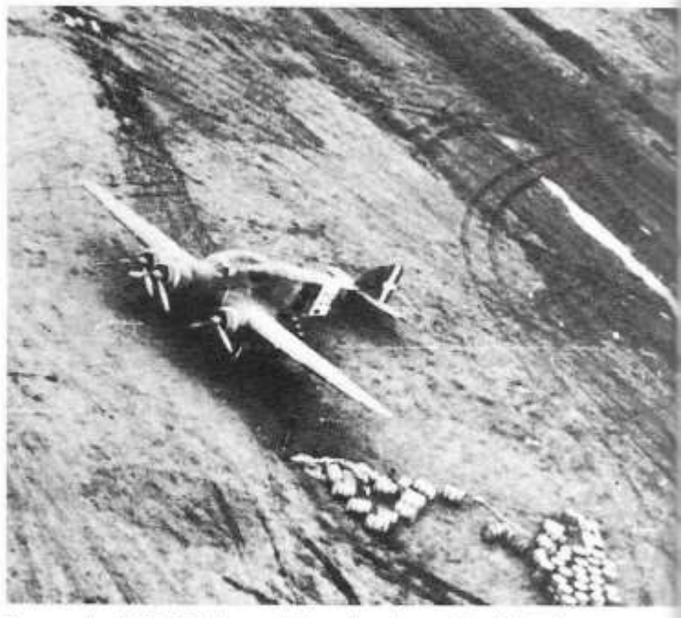
Later it was the turn of Belgrade, previously divided into 6 areas of attack also including the airports of Zemun and Semlin, which was heavily affected by two consecutive days from 549, bombers between Ju.87, Ju.88, He. 111, Do.17 that in 10 raids started between 08:04 hours of April 6 and 17:35 of the following day, dropped 6551 bombs of all types (bomb type A- B of 35 kg. and ordnance type SC/LMB of 1000 kg.) that hit the city area, causing serious damage to buildings and countless victims among the civilian population calculated in about 20,000 people of all ages.

At the airport of Zemun were destroyed hundreds of airplanes including almost all of Hurricane and Bf. 109/E and there was also a brief confrontation between Yugoslavs fighter aircraft of English manufacture (Hurricane) and German (Messerschmitt) due to identification misunderstanding. Other Luftwaffe bombing took place on the town of Sarajevo, Kraguijevac, Nis, Skopje, Zagreb, Maribor; on the lines of "Weichs groups attack" on the march from Styria towards Zagreb; "Kleist” from Bulgaria and directed out of Belgrade; "Dumme" marching on Skopje to split into two deployment on the Greek-Yugoslav border; Hungarians pointed out Jambor and Novi Sad ancient Hungarian town of Vojvodina and the Bulgarians heading for Veles and Monastir in Macedonia; Italians moved a few days later - more slowly from the north - and from the south pushing on the Dalmatian -Montenegrin coast in the interior of Slovenia, Croatia, Sandzak.

The rapid intervention of the Luftwaffe and intensity of destructive attacks could soon break up any form of resistance in unsettling any further opportunity to halt the advance of the armed forces of the Tripartite coming from every direction.

In the first two days of strikes over 200 Yugoslav aircraft were destroyed on the fields by the Luftwaffe and as many were captured intact during the rapid advance, when one considers that an armored division ran 112 km in just 12 hours to occupy Zagreb.

The 11th moved on the Julian frontier also the Italian 2nd Army directed on Ljubljana (Slovenia), Split and Sibenik (Dalmatia) followed the same day by Albania units in March on Cetinje (Montenegro), Ragusa (Dalmatia) and , Northern Macedonia (Dibra and Ohrid).[262]



Three-engined SM. 79 during refueling of an airport of Apulia At the same time the attack against Greece, opened to the east a new war front against Yugoslavia, which saw the participation of several departments of R.A.

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Meeting between Italian and German soldiers to Albania's eastern border in Yugoslav territory. Even Yugoslavia, close on all sides by the Axis had to surrender unconditionally after a few days of war and air strikes.

On April 12, the Germans came to Belgrade and on the 17th Yugoslavia surrendered without conditions to the Axis after Italian and German units had met in Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia.

The war operations ended the 18th while the Yugoslav government and King Peter II and his advisers abandoned the country and took refuge first in Athens, then in Egypt and finally in London.

In just 12 days had ended victoriously for the Tripartite war campaign against Yugoslavia.

The Yugoslav air force, on which they fed some initial apprehensions for action that it could play with his large number of modern aircraft of the 1st line, was caught completely by surprise and quickly neutralized on the airfields. But to be honest other factors had contributed to these results independently from the effective destructive action of Lufwaffe, which was previously informed and updated on the latest operational location of R.Y.A.F., by a Croatian pilot flying officer who had defected to the North in the German lines, wearing the detailed plan on the situation of fighter and bombers units and the transfer of the from Serbia and Bosnia airports for more decentralized bases.

They occurred during the conflict also the first racial and ethnic-religious divisions between the mosaic of peoples of Yugoslavia, to the point that the 2nd Aviation Regiment of fighters based in Kruljevac, composed almost entirely of Croatian pro German elements, mutinied and destroyed by fire almost all the unit’s aircraft so as not fight the Reich.

On the same day - 6 April 1941 - in which the Tripartite attacked Yugoslavia, showed itself the German offensive against Greece, which is expected to start on April 10, had only been postponed for a few days as a result of known events in Yugoslavia.

The operation "Marita" had as a preliminary move the "Boheme" Group's move (3 Inf. Div. - 1 Pz. Div.) to the Greek borders to complete the deployment started with the "Stumme" group (2 Alp. Div. - 2. Pz. Div - 1. Mot. SS Div.).

The attack plan called for the achievement of the following assumptions:

1) Insulation of Kampfgruppe "Stumme" between Greek and Yugoslav forces to prevent concentrations of units and military and cooperation tactical (military operations in the territory of Yugoslavia).

2) Insulation of the "Boheme" Kampfgruppe between the Greek army stationed in Macedonia. (Military Operations in Greek territory).

3) Attack and break through the fortified "Metaxas" line at the border with Bulgaria by the "Boheme" Kgr.

4) Liaison with the Italian units from Albania ("Stumme" Kgr.).

The right wing of "Boheme" Kgr. operating to the S.W. was to contribute to the operation of the "Stumme" Kgr. intended to occupy Skoplje and then turn left towards Vales and head towards the northern border of Greece to meet up with the units coming from Lake Ohrid.[263]

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The Bersaglieri still wading the Kalamas surpassing the Greek border with their "Moose" Guzzi. The victory arrive finally the Italian soldiers after long months of disappointment, bitterness, moral and material deprivations of all kinds.

On April 7, the Stukas could dive with repeated attacks to break all Yugoslav resistance before Skoplje that was occupied the same day by the 9th Pz. Div. with the vanguards was attested in the evening at Vales 40km to the S.W.

The 8th Prilep was occurred, the 9th Monastir and the 11th occurred the meeting between German tanks and alpine of the "Cuneense" from Albania.

The SS Pz. Div. "Leib Standarte Adolf Hitler", then went beyond the Greek border, occupied Florina, bypassing Kastoria, pushed on the 19th south and then turn around to NW and through the Metsovon pass reaching Gianina - objective of the glorious "Julia" back in October 1940, then going up the left bank of Vojussa stood just south of the Perati bridge where it will meet on the 22nd the first Bersaglieri motorcyclists coming from Albania.

A mortifying aspect of war that disregards hopes and sacrifices of the Italian troops of Albania!

The "Boheme" group avoided a frontal attack on the "Metaxas" 10 km long and fulfilling a long outflanking movement with Alpine troops backed by Ju.87 conquered the Pass of Strumitza and penetrating into the Vardar valley from its northern reaches, and isolated the wandering fortified "Metaxas" line capturing 4 Greek divisions in the fortifications, conquered Thessaloniki on April 9th capturing even the Chief of the Greek Army G.S.G. Gen. Papagos. Before the advancing German towards the heart of Greece is now interposed a modest fortified defense line from the residual Hellenic units and the entire British Expeditionary Corps of Gen. Maitland Wilson in Greece.

Again, exactly one year's time from the battles of Flanders and Dunkirk, British and German soldiers were facing each other again in the field!

THE "BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE TO GREECE "

The British military presence in Greece was manifested immediately after the October 1940 attack by Italy with the landing in Crete of 6000 foot soldiers, anti-aircraft and coastal batteries, two squadrons of the RAF bomber and one bomber/torpedo bombers of the FAA, reinforced shortly after by another 3 Sqdns. bombers and one fighter.[264]

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The negotiations to reach a political military agreements between Greece and England in a form close and profitable than it did previously, were conducted by Foreign Minister Anthony Eden for the diplomatic part and General Archibald Wavell for the military and completed in January 1941 after the rejection by the Yugoslav to join a military pact between Greece, England and Yugoslavia, despite the commitment by the English to ensure the two nations through the presence in Greece of a strong expeditionary force of 100,000 men, 240 field guns, 32 heavy guns, 142 tanks, 192 anti-tank cannons, 10,000 vehicles. The RAF would contest with 12 squads divided into 3 Wings between bombers and fighters according to a program prepared by Air Marshal Arthur Longmore.

Squadrons that the RAF sent to Greece including the 11th, 84th, 113th and 211th of “Blenheim” bombers, a group of "Wellington" bombers and torpedo "Swordfish" of the 85th Sqdn. FAA and Sqdn. 33rd, 80th, 112th of "Hurricane," "Gloster" part of which is also present in 208th Sqdn. of aero-cooperation with the army.

After the agreements of January was given the start to transfer operations and on March 4 the first British troops arrived in Piraeus on board 3 M.F. cruisers followed in the days after the first convoys with troops and materials.

In chronological order they reached Greece from Egypt 2nd New Zealand Inf. Div., the 6th Australian, a British armored brigade, two regiments of heavy artillery, 4 A/A regiments and 2 anti-tank, technical services, logistics, broadcasting, health: total 60,000 soldiers well armed and equipped.

Military agreements provide for the defense entrusted to B.E.F. of the Greece fortified line of Aliacmo (located behind the Metaxas) which with its 96 km. length stretching from Mount Olympus (2918 m) south of Caterini, until the Yugoslav border in N.E. Edessa.

The majority of the Greek army was busy with 16 divisions against Italy and only 7 Greek Inf. Div. were available for the defense of other zones (4 for safeguarding the Metaxas).

The collapse of the Greek fortified line, the army of Macedonia surrender, the capture of Gen. Papagos, Thessaloniki's conquest represented only the beginning of the storm that was gathering on the fate of the BEF.

The first signs occurred during a raid of the Luftwaffe at the port of Piraeus where the explosion of a large ship of 12,000 tons loaded with ammunition caused the sinking of the other ships to 41,500 tons. In retaliation the RAF bombed the railways of Bulgaria by night with Wellingtons.

On April 10, the first German avant-garde came into contact with the outposts of the BEF on the Aliacmo not yet fully staffed for the pressure of world events.

The advance of the "Leib SS Standarte A. Hitler" on the Epirus, created the conditions for a new bypass of the fortified line of Aliacmo as happened a few days before the "Metaxas."

This disturbing incident induced Gen. Wilson to promptly abandon the northern Aliacmo and deploy the BEF between Mount Olympus and Kozani in which locations clashed British tanks, of the 1st Armoured Brigade and German tanks of the 9th Panzer Div. soon they were able to get the better of the English and to continue the advance on the main route Trikkala-Larissa-Athens. The SS Pz. Div. "A. Hitler” then marched to the S.E. towards the Aegean sea of Missolonghi, the 5th Div. of mountain fights climbed Mount Olympus and descended pushing down toward he valley to the south the BEF in retreat.

Small compared to the massive presence of the Luftwaffe was the intervention of the RAF with sporadic attacks on German columns validly thwarted by German fighters that felled many Blenheim.

Anew defensive line was promptly prepared by Gen. Wilson at Thermopylae in the hope of repeating the legendary resistance of Leonidas and his 300 Spartans, but three days later the German tanks were already in place delayed by many road blocks from the actual resistance of the British.

72 hours prior to the Luftwaffe had been necessary to prepare the operation "Brucke" (Bridge) which aimed through the iron bridge on the occupation of Corinth canal, identify the Thessaly and the Peloponnesus to trap the troops blocked the north of the important bridge.[265]

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Aerial view of the Corinth Canal, an important strategic position of the British BEF thought of defending against the advance of the German armored units engaged in "Marita"

At dawn on 26 April, 270 JU.52s took off from Plovdiv airport in Bulgaria and dropped two battalions of paratroopers reinforced by artillery on the north and south sides of the bridge while a group of pioneers aboard DFS 230 gliders landed directly at the mouth of the bridge and, having overcome the resistance of the guard personnel, occupied the important structure, blocking the retreat of the BEF.

The Airborne assault action had been effectively supported by the Luftwaffe who had beaten the areas south and north of the bridge with Stukas and fighter bombers disrupting marching columns, defensive positions, concentrations of vehicles. They were captured over 3,000 British and numerous vehicles and equipment.

The operation "Brucke" was completely successful but unfortunately a stray artillery shell accidentally struck by a flame causing the explosion and destruction of the bridge that was quickly repaired by Germanic engineers.

The rapid dissolution Greek army, the unexpected retreat of the BEF who had refused a confrontation with the German units as it was in forecasts and Churchill's intentions, the chaotic boarding in the ports of the Peloponnesus under the relentless attacks of the Luftwaffe, the abandonment of much heavier the equipment: 400 guns, 104 tanks, 8,000 vehicles, 1800 guns, 40,000 tons of materials, food, ammunition, fuel and 12,000 prisoners were harshly the price paid by the BEF in Greece did not stop the advanced of the Werhmacht attempted to save the situation: a second Dunkirk that allowed the evacuation of 45,000 soldiers of Commonwealth with the loss of 2 DDs and merchant ships for 115,000 tons sunk by Luftwaffe bombers.[266]

The important bridge in the channel Cerro occupied by a daring operation Airborne assault of German paratroopers took off from Bulgaria. British soldiers of the BEF surrender. An artillery shell blew up the bridge accidentally hitting the post of demolition

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On April 27 Athens was occupied after the King George II and his family with the Greek Government had been evacuated prior to Crete and then to Egypt with British ships.

The RAF had lost in four days 137 aircraft between fighters and bombers destroyed on the ground, and 72 others in fighting the omnipresent Luftwaffe and especially the VIII Flieger Korps. The Royal Navy had lost 2 DDs, four transport ships, 21 merchantmen.

To this add after the heavy losses suffered by the Greek Royal Navy with the sinking of 2 DDs, 9 torpedo boats, 4 Minesweeper and the old battleship "Kilkys" sank in the port of Salamis.

The greatest losses were those imposed on merchant ships comprising to 30 April 58 ships between merchantmen and oil tankers of over 240,000 T. S .L.

The absolute domination of the sky by the Luftwaffe when integrated into the sea by the intervention of Battle Fleet of the Italian Navy, would redeem the sad date of Cape Matapan and marked the beginning of the Italian naval supremacy: an extraordinary missed opportunity by Supermarina still under the psychological trauma of Matapan day!

The naval force made available to the M.F. for the evacuation of the BEF (6 cruisers and 19 DDs) it would have been swept away by the vehemence of the Luftwaffe as actually would have occurred a few weeks later during the Battle for Crete.

In the short space of time of three weeks (April 6 to 30) the Werhmacht with a new and extraordinary manifestation of efficiency and power, had annihilated the Yugoslavian and Greek armies, navy and air force destroyed the two countries, caused heavy losses to the BEF with severe loss of prestige of England, created excellent political and strategic conditions in the Balkans reassuring the OKW to start with more confidence to attack the Soviet Union only postponed two weeks of schedule.

To make the final arrangement in the eastern Mediterranean remained now to solve the problem of conquering the important island of Crete of great strategic value.

REQUIREMENT EAST – YUGOSLAVIA

(War Operations 6/18 April 1941)

The possibility of an armed conflict with Yugoslavia, latent since the Locarno Treaty [1925], and taking into account constantly by the G.S.G by making studies and plans in the latest locations, had in certain periods reasons of scaremongering and relaxation alternate but to start from 1936 Italian diplomacy had made considerable progress improving the relations between the two nations.

The particular composition of the various ethnic groups that lived in Yugoslavia: Slovenes, Croats, Dalmatians, Bosnians, Albanians, representing a diverse mosaic of races deeply divided among themselves by religion, language, customs, national aspirations, hatreds and resentments and constituted always reasons of concern for the government in Belgrade and of course for those of the seven neighboring countries directly concerned in one way or another to the protection and the - more or less legitimate claims - of own ethnic minorities.

To this add after the low credibility and loyalty that aroused the Yugoslav government policy in the international community, on account of the multifarious nature nationalistic, political and diplomatic conduct of the Slavic representatives of different origin and extraction.

In 1939, the expulsion from the government's Foreign Minister Stojadinovic who had been so used to establish relations of friendship and good neighborly relations with Italy, had created concerns in Rome and did foreshadow a further rapprochement of Yugoslavia in the orbit of traditional Anglo alliance of the Belgrade government.

This new situation, that recreated potentially other dangers to Italy, had as its counterpart the occupation of Albania to further secure Italy from any future eventualities with the government in Belgrade.

The plan prepared by Stamage for Yugoslavia (requirement E - East), was part of a wider operational context of P.R. 12 Bis (then known as set aside in favor of P.R. 12) because it had reasonable grounds that Yugoslavia would remain neutral but alert in the new World War just started.[267]

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The German offensive in the West in May 1940 and fortuitous discovery in a French train station important secret documents of the Daladier government which showed unequivocally the existence of a military agreement between France, Greece and Yugoslavia coalition to attack and defend from Italy, made the documents sent to the Italian Government by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs advised the Reich increased surveillance and the adoption of precautionary measures of the government in Belgrade, due to the duplicity of the stalling behavior and the real danger that could run to the Italian Giulia border, in Albania, in the possessions of the Dodecanese. It was not until the spring of 1941 because the Yugoslav issue returned to the fore in a more dramatic form; first by joining the Tripartite Pact, then for the dismissal of the government Zvetkovic followed by the Simovic coup whose first decision was to lead to the annulment immediate crude and clumsy, Yugoslav accession to the Axis, and to create the political conditions and military intervention of the Tripartite in Yugoslavia.

The PR. 12 Bis - dated with the latest versions sent by S.I.M. inserted between 1940-41 foresaw an attack from three directions: *north* (Frontier Giulia), *center* (Zadar Garrison), *south* (Albania). It was obviously planned unspecified aviation participation, coordinated and detailed in the individual operational plans drawn up by the sector and the participant G.U. commanders.

The information on Yugoslavia that S.I.M. managed to find before the Italian, proved extraordinarily important for the richness of detail and accuracy of the information obtained; these reports were of great benefit to the Italian command to set the plans of attack, confuse the enemy with false communications, throwing confusion and generate confusion and indecision among the Slavs Commands and provided ultimately excellent results for the successful conclusion of operations.

He was unaware of the exact composition of commands and G.U., their geographical location, the staff of peace and war, the number of prepared and mobilized divisions, the type of weapons and equipment supplied to the Yugoslavian Armed Forces, the defensive system and the fortifications in the service, the location of Army units, units of the Navy and Air Force and many other useful information. Yugoslav Army Chief of the G.S.G at the moment of intervention was Gen. Nedic.

In early April 1941 were the under arms in Yugoslavia more than 600,000 men of the Army who had 9 Armies with three Army groups and 30-32 divisions between infantry, cavalry, one motorized.

Bordering N.W. (Italy-Austria) had settled 1st of Army Group (Gen Petrovic) with 4th and 7th; 3rd Army Group (3rd, 5th and 6th) the command of General Nedic was stationed in SE between the Albanian borders, Greek, Bulgarian, 2nd Army Group (2nd, 8th and 9th) was located at the NE border (Hungary-Romania) and finally the coastal Army (1st) the Adriatic coast garrison.

The ordering of the infantry division was up 3 rifle Regiments and 2 Artillery Regiment and had more organic texture of the similar Italian division, increased firepower in individual and collective weapons; the guns were the most modern type than those of the Italian mod. CK-06/SK older than thirty years assigned to the divisions of the army.

The individual and unit weapons of the German and French production was excellent in repeating rifles type Mauser, in Hotchkiss mod. machine guns, in offensive and defensive grenades, in heavy mortars, in anti-tank and in heavy artillery. The Yugoslav army lacked mobility like the Italian, the divisional artillery were horse-drawn like those of most of the G.U. of the army.

Much more modern than the army was rather aviation which since 1939 had implemented a flight of material modernization program of the line, by purchasing aircraft among the most advanced of the time: from Italy (SM.79 bomber, Ca.310 tactical reconnaissance) from Germany (Do.17 bomber, Bf.109, fighter), England (Blenheim bomber, Hurricane fighter); France was represented by Breguet XIX aircraft for aerial observation. There were 170 modern bombers: 70 Do.17, 50 Bristol, 45 SM.79; 150 fighters among the most technically advanced: 70 Messerschmitt Bf.109/E (the same fighter used by the Luftwaffe in the “Battle of Britain” - note) 30 Hawker "Hurricane" (the most popular RAF fighters) 50 fighters mod. 2 IK/IK 3 design and production with Yugoslav speed and armament exceeding M.C.200 and recently built. And also old "Fury" biplanes with similar characteristics to, CR.32 but with 20 mm. cannon.[268]

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A total of 330-350 aircraft of modern concepts technical and operational and military characteristics superior to modern Italian aviation aircraft.

Approximately 200 scouts between Ca.310, Potez 63 and Breguet XIX completed the Yugoslav aviation 1st line supplemented by a hundred naval aviation seaplanes divided into six operational squadrons fighters and - light anti-submarine bombers completed by a mixed squadron -School/tactical Training.

Another 220/250 airplanes of various types (Bucher, Dewoitine, Fiat, Fizir etc.) 6 squadrons were in service in the school, in the autonomous units of link, training, transportation.

Compressively the number of aircraft supplied to the Royal Yugoslav Air Force according to statistics issued in 1940 by the beginning of 1941 S.I.M., could be ascend to 870-900.

An air force of considerable importance that was to be held in an objective consideration and objective evaluation.

The sort of R.Y.A.F. included: a High Command of Aeronautics based in Belgrade; 3 Brigade Air Command with headquarters in Zemun (Belgrade) Zagreb, Skopje; 8 Regiments aviation (3 bombers, 3 fighter, one reconnaissance, 1 mixed by cooperation (tactical support) divided in turn into 50 organic squadrons. Yugoslav Aviation Commander was Gen. Simovic, Deputy Commander Gen. Mirkovic and chief of Staff Gen. Jankovic. Gen Simovic, commander in chief of Jugoslovenska Ratno Vozduhoplavsto, was the champion of the military coup that that overthrew the Zvetkovic government replacing with another government headed by the commander of the JRV (author's note).

According to information gleaned from S.I.A., in the spring of 1941, the updated situation on J.R.V. (Jugoslovensko Ratno Vozduhoplavsto) was as follows for what concerned the organic composition and location of the 8 Regiment of the 1st line:

1st -Navisadi -B. -Do.17
2nd -Sarajevo -B. -Do.17
3rd -Skoplje -B. Bristol “Blenheim”
4th -Zagreb -F. IK.2/IK.3
5th -Nis -F. Hawker “Hurricane" MK.l
6th -Zemun F. Messerschmitt Bf.109 lE
7th -Mostar -Mixed B/F. SM.79 -Hawker “Fury“
8th -Kraguievac -Mixed B/F, Training (rare aircraft Do.17, SM.79, Bf.l09). The pilot schools were located respectively in Mostar, Semlin, Banja Luka, Agram and the flight material grouped into two special groups with 6 Sqd. and 2 Joint Schools with 7 Sqd. The Sqd. by aerial and maritime reconnaissance, they were decentralized to the Army Command and Divisional-commands and the Navy and the naval sector. The Aviation for the Navy that depended for use and administratively by the High Command of Naval Fleet, was divided into three commands sector and with offices in Vodice, Divulje and Djenovic (Danube).

The territorial anti-aircraft defense possession of 4 Regiment A/A Artillery with Skoda guns 80/50 and 75/52 from -Schneider of modern design, integrated defense to h.q. by Hotchkiss type auto cannon and Zbrojovska cal. 15. A Battalion, barrage balloons completed the air defense of the national territory. Underdeveloped resulted instead the A/A defense the Army G.U. whose importance had obviously not had the necessary consideration. The unimproved or available airports for flight activities included numerous airfields divided into two categories: permanent and auxiliary. What is included and cataloged by the SIA as included within the range of the R.A. They included:

North (Slovenia, Croatia), Ljubljana, Agram, St. Butmir, Kranj, Radovjca, Bistrica, Celje, Zagreb, Ribnico, Karlovac, Sisak, Senj, Bos Novi, Krupa, Banja Luka.

Center (Dalmatia, Herzegovina, Bosnia) Divulje, Lukovo, Obrovac, Bihac, Knin, Nqvigrad, Vodice, Crappano, Trogir, Sibenik, Split, Zemunik Donji, Sinj, Mostar, Podgoritza, Dubrovnik, Sarajevo, Plievlja, Rogatica, Visegrad.

South (Montenegro, Macedonia) Niksic, Skopje, Bjelo Polje, Kolasin, Cetovo, Gostivar, Kicevo. And also in Serbia group of airports around Belgrade (Semlin, Zemun).

PREPARING THE ATTACK

Beginning from March 15 Superesercito activated Requirement E and alerted the Giulia border and the 2nd Army (Gen. Vittorio Ambrosio) of the garrison east, reinforced it with new G.U. Quick, Armor and semi-motorized drawn from the Army of the Po, supplemented by other 3 Sqd. by O.A, in support to those normally assigned to the Army. The G.U. already located in the area included:[269]

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XI Corps (Gen. M. Robotti) with Inf. Div. "Re," "Soca", autonomous units of GAF and alpine groupings; V Army Corps (General R. Balocco) with Div. Inf. "Sassari", "Bergamo", "Lombardia", GAF and other services units. The anti-aircraft defense of the sector was very modest and had only 3 batteries 20/65 drawn of sub-units (12 guns) reinforced later by a group of old A/A field cannons 75/27 CK (Krupp Commission) put up for the anti-aircraft role (12 pieces).

At the end of March came reinforcing the 2nd Army the following G.U.: VI Corps (Gen. R. Dalmazzo) with Div. Inf. "Friuli" "Assietta", "Ravenna" and the truck transportable Army Corps (Gen. F. Zingales) with Arm. Div. "Littorio", and Aut. Div. "Torino" and "Pasubio"; the Celere Corps (Gen. Ferrari-Orsi) with the 1st Cel. Div. "Eugene of Savoy“, the 2nd “Emanuele Filiberto testa di ferro", 3rd "Prince Amedeo Duca d'Aosta".

The overall strength of the 5 Army Corps deployed to the Julian border exceeded 240,000 men.

The tasks assigned to the 2nd Army from Stamage through Superesercito provided: Day X-early offensive movement on the director Sussak-Zara-Sebenico-Spalato where the meeting would take place with the troops coming from Albania. Day X + 1 beginning offensive movement in the eastern sector (Slovenia) in the direction of Ljubljana until you meet the German troops from the Styria-Carinthia. Autonomous movements would be entrusted to the garrison of Zadar (Gen. Giglioli) which included units of various arms and specialties to about 10,000 men. The previous hierarchical dependence of the VI Army Corps. It would be passed directly to Superesercito. In Zadar the attitude to take was initially based on considering the defensive: the local situation, geographical isolation, attacking numerical preponderance, but could have been modified according to the changing situation.

The attack from the south (Albania) had been entrusted to XVII and XIV Army Corps divided into two direct commands; for the north sector (Montenegro) and east (Macedonia) integrated in the latter field by a special command (Librashd) which depended on the 9th Army and had to act in the area located between the Greek-Yugoslav border (Lake Ohrid); XVII Army Corps (Gen. Pafundi) included the Inf. Div. "Messina", "Marche", and Arm. Div. "Centauro" (reorganized with new material - M.13 / 40 tank - and restored organically) and also the CC.NN. Regimental group "Diamanti," the Albanian CC.NN. Legion “Skandenberg", the Cav. Regiment "Guide" and Bersaglieri Battalion, CC.RR., G.d.F, G.A.F. autonomous groups backed by artillery and services.

The XIV Army Corps (Gen. G. Vecchi) provided the Inf. Div. "Puglia" Alp. "Cuneense", the Cav. Regiment. "Aosta" and CC.RR., G.d.F. Battalions, G.A.F. units and services.

The “Librashd” sector (Command headquarters locations in Albania) the command of General G. Masci included the Inf. Div. "Arezzo", "Firenze" and "Pinerolo", the 4th Bersaglieri Regiment, the Cav. Regiment. "Lancieri di Milano" and G.d.F. Battalion, Forestry CC.NN. Regimental group “Agostini" Grouped to CC.NN. "Biscaccianti" smaller units, services, including platoons of the Navy in service on Lake Ohrid.

Altogether the northern and eastern borders Albanians were deployed around 130,000 men who carried a total of 400,000 soldiers of every arm the mass of forces prepared by Stamage for Requirement East.

PARTICIPATION OF THE R.A.

Since September 1940 Stamage with the order no. 2458/OP addressed to G.S. of the three Armed Forces, previewed the possibility of future operations against Yugoslavia (Requirement E) calling on those responsible to guide operational plans and studies for this eventuality finishing the work so as to conclude by the end of October, the planned deployment.

Temporarily set aside the Requirement E, followed months of uncertainty and conflicting orders until the date of March 6, 1941 when Stamage re-ordered the activation of Requirement East Air Force in implementing what was doing already for a few days the Army , stating with Order No. 7609 of 27 March 1941: "... be ready for every eventuality at the Giulia border, in the Adriatic and Albania, in relation to the events that were taking place in Yugoslavia and waiting to agree on a common line with Germany“.[270]

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On March 30 Stamage would communicated the line maximum of the agreements with the Germans summarized as follows:

Day X -Participation of German troops in the Yugoslav territory from Bulgaria.

Day X + 1 - Other German forces could enter in Yugoslavia coming from Romania and Greece - directed on Thessaloniki - and from Bulgaria, with the task of isolating the two countries.

The Luftwaffe would have participated in operations in the Balkans with the 4th Luftflotte fully integrated as well by 20th Group CT (Maj. Mario Bonzano) which at the time appeared organically employed tactics of G.U.A. German after the dissolution of C.A.I., although the quick fix of the war with Yugoslavia blocked the movement started from France (Cazaux base) to Austria (Wienf Aspern) on which had to move from the Italian fighter unit.

The 4th Luftflotte (Gen. Lohr) possessed the VIII Flieger Korps (Gen. W. von Richthofen) XI (Gen. K. Student) and units from X FI. Kps. (Gen. H. Geisler) posted between Sicily and Libya.

Were available 16 level bomber groups He. 111, Tu.8a and Do.17 belonging to K,G. 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 26th, 54th and 77th and to LG.1. 9 groups for tactical support from Stukas, destroyers and assault with aircraft Ju.87, Bf.110 and Hs.123 from St.G. 2nd, 3rd, Z.G. 77th, and ZG.26th integrated by LG 2; 10 fighter Bf.109 groups JG.27 of 77, 54 and LG.2; 4 groups of tactical observation for the army (H. Gr. 4th, 2nd, 12th and 22nd) with aircraft Hs.126, and He.46 Fi.156 and finally for the logistic support 14 groups with three-engined transport Ju.52 of the KG. zvb. 1st and 2nd and T.Gr. zvb 40, 50, 60, 101, 102, 105, 106 incorporated by LLG1 with 4 groups of gliders DFS.230.

A total of 54 Groups with 18 Stormi or autonomous units with a total of 162 operational squadrons and 14 squadrons command. The sequence of events would have the following program agreed between the Axis commands:

D + 9 -The 2nd German Army from Austria would be penetrated with the director of Belgrade into Yugoslavia.

Attitude Italian Armed Forces.:

Army Group Albania defensive on all theaters of war.

Opposite Julia - offensive immediately after the action of the Armed Forces Germans with the task of acting on the rear of the Yugoslav deployment.

Tasks for the Air Force:

Perform actions against aviation tending to destroy the Yugoslav air force and prevent the British and Greek Air Force to make use of Yugoslavian bases.

Act offensively on naval bases of Kotor, Spalato and Sibenik; contribute to terrestrial actions with the bombing of targets to be determined in agreement with the air force of the Reich.

In compliance with the provisions of the G.S.G, the G.S./RA took timely agreements with G.S/OKL to delimit the boundaries of the operational areas of their air forces during the offensive against Yugoslavia cycle.

Laborious negotiations were necessary to convince the Germans not to limit the objectives of R.A. only to the Adriatic coast and in adjacent areas the Albanian-Yugoslav border as they wanted the representatives of the G.S./Luftwaffe in order as they said, "to avoid as much as possible identification misunderstandings considering the presence of Italian and German aircraft in aviation similar to Yugoslav; avoid as far as possible the destruction of facilities and infrastructure of vital importance for the Wehrmacht in the future anticipation of having to transfer bases of the Yugoslav to units of the Luftwaffe. "

The Italian Air Force G.S. worried instead and above all, to quickly eliminate the Yugoslavian airpower to avoid or minimize any air offenses to cities and industrial centers of the peninsula, whereas the air deployment of the J.R.V. gravitated to the extent of 60% of his offensive potential to Italy.

In fact, the S.I.A. had established in the spring the presence of four air regiments on bases close to the borders, namely: 2nd Regiment in Sarajevo, 3rd in Skopje, 4th in Zagreb and the 7th in Mostar; another regiment - the 5th of Mis - was less than 200 km from the Albanian border while the others were at varying distances between 160/220 km of national borders. These units included 2 bomber regiments and 12 fighter Sqd. of forward bases and the eventual use of another fighter regiment acting on trampoline fields.[271]

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The agreements reached in direct talks between the Italian and German leaders were broader than those obtained previously by Stamage, although it prevailed in principle the Luftwaffe idea of limiting Italians attacks on targets in the immediate within the land of the Dalmatian -Montenegro coast, however, giving preference only precision strikes on specific targets and greater freedom of action for the ground strafing. The Stamage approved the obtained variants, also in view of the low availability of bomber units that the GS/RA could be made available for operations on Yugoslavia being Aeralba and 4th Air Fleet involved at most of their troops for the final phase of the campaign Greece.

For the Requirement East (version 1941) were made available to the following units mostly coming from the 2nd Air Fleet (Gen. S.A. Gennaro Tedeschini-Lalli), namely:

Bombing

Aviano – 18th Stormo BT (Col. P. Altan) with BR.20 with the 31st Group (Sqd. 65/66) Lt. Col. G. Bordin 37th Group (Sqd. 47/48) Maj. P. Lauri Filzi (Emilia) Group 25th (Sqd. 8/9) Maj. R. Pagliochini stationed in Forlì with twin-engine BR.20 (detached from the 7th Stormo BT), 99th Group (Sqd. 242/243) Lt. Col. I. Ravazzoni with base in Vicenza and BR.20 aircraft (detached from 43rd Stormo BT) is a total of 4 groups with 8 squadrons for a total of 61 BR.20/M.

Fighters

4th Stormo CT/9th Gruppo (Sqd. 73/96 (Cap. A. Larsimont-Pergameni based in Gorizia and the 97th Sqd. advanced to Altura Pula - aircraft Macchi C.200.

10th Group (Sqd. 84/90/91) Lt. Col. C. Romagnoli in Ronchi with MC.200.

54th Stormo (Col. C. Calosso) 7th Group (Sqd. 76/86/98) Maj. M. Dimple - at Treviso with MC.200. 16th Group (Sqd. 167/168) Lt. Col. F. Beccaria in Ravenna with the 169th Sqd. detached in Campoformido Udine – aircraft MC.200; 4 groups with a total of 12 squadrons with 90 MC.200 fighters.

The Aviation for the R.E. included the following units:

61st Group OA -34a Sqd. with Ca.311, Gorizia;
71st Group OA -38th Sqd. with Ro.37Bis, Udine;
63rd Group OA -41st Sqd with Ro.37 Bis, Udine;
113th Sqd. with Ro.37Bis, Udine;
71st Group OA -116th Sqd. with Ro.37Bis, Udine;
128th Sqd. with Ca.311, Gorizia;
61st Group OA -36th Sqd. with Ro.37Bis, Heights of Pula.
A total of 41 scouts divided between 15 and Ca.311 26 Ro.37Bis.

The responsibility for use of the units of O.A. the 2nd Army was entrusted to Col. Renzo Lavaroni with operating headquarters in Pula.

The division in the G.U. of the groups was as follows: 71st Group O.A. the V Corps, 61st Group O.A. reinforced with squadrons of 63rd Group assigned to the VI Corps.

The total number of aircraft at the disposal of the 2nd Army and deployed in northern Italy was of 192 (61 bombers, 90 fighters, 41 reconnaissance).

The Esercitavia provisions specified with order no. 2802 of the 2nd Army Command, predicted the fulfillment of the following tasks: "Exploring the ways of the Yugoslav communications from the valley of Kranj and Ljubljana to the state border."

Even the command of the 4th Air Fleet had provisions to Superaereo to employ the employees units for Need East and General Ilari assigned it the following groups:

Bombing

39th Group BT (Sqd. 51/69) Lt. Col. G. Porta with Fiat BR.20 base in Foggia.
40th Group BT (Sqd. 202/203) with BR.20 (detached from Aeralba) based in Foggia.
104th Group BT (Sqd. 252/253) with SM.79 based in Foggia.
95th Group BT (Sqd. 252/253) Maj. G. Morbidelli with Cant.l007 Bis based in Brindisi.
For a total of 46 bombers (15 Cant.1007 Bis, 16 BR.20/M, 15 SM.79).

Fighters

8th Group Aut. CT (Sqd. 93) of MC.200, Jesi (later Oria).
153rd Group CT (Sqd. 370/373/374) Maj. A. Beneforti with MC.200 based in Foggia.
Total n. 52 MC.200 fighters.
Overall strength of the 4th Air Fleet 98 aircraft (46 bombers, 52 fighters).
Air Force Albania had contributed to operations with the following units:[272]

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Bombing
101st Group Aut. B.aT (Sqd. 208/238) Maj. G. Donadio with Ju.87, Tirana.
force available No. 20 assault.

Fighters
22nd Group Aut. CT (Sqd. 359/362/369) Maj. G. Borzoni of MC.200, Tirana.
150th Group Aut. CT (Sqd. 363/364/365) of CR.42/MC.200, Tirana.
24th Group Aut. CT (Sqd. 354/355) of G.50, Devoli.
160th Group Aut. CT (Sqd. 393/394) Maj. A. Mastragostino of G.50, Devoli.
Fighters Total n. 113 (57 MC.200, 26 G.50, 30 CR.42).

Reconnaissance
7th Group O.A. -114th Sqd. (Northern Sector) Ca.311, Tirana -25th Sqd. (Northeastern sector) Ro.37 Bis, Devoli.
72nd Group O.A. -120th Sqd. (Northern Sector) Ca.311, Durres -35th Sqd. (Eastern Sector) Ro.37 Bis, Peqini.
Total scouts n. 34 (17 Ca.311 -17 Ro.37 Bis).
Total n. 167 aircraft assigned with 20 dive bombers, 113 fighters, 34 reconnaissance aircraft.

The total air forces that R.A. could make available to the Stamage for direct and indirect support to Requirement East, then ascended to 457 aircraft from bombers (127) Fighters (255), Recon (75). But that number were to add potentially another 220 aircraft specifically used against targets in Greece but also usable in case of need, with 360° of their autonomy from bases located in Puglia and Albania.

It was necessary to take some precautionary measures including the among which the of Shkodra Airport eviction which was about only 70 km from the Yugoslav border (of Grakovo / Trebjnje airport), this measure particularly appropriate since Scutari was bombed immediately from the start of hostilities.

The breakdown of the operational areas of responsibility had been fixed by Superaereo thus:

1) 2nd Air Squadron -Area Tarvisio - Spalato near Pescara (border ZAT);

2) 4th Air Squadron -Area from Spalato to the northern Albanian border;

3) Air Force Albania territorial -Fascia adjacent to the Albanian-Yugoslav border in particular -Objectives Erzegovina/Sandzak.

Tasks set for tactical use:

a) To contribute to the barrier of state borders hindering enemy movement and inflows into national borders in cooperation with the Army G.U. placed to defend the country.

b) Attack the enemy air force on the ground and in the air hitting the bases and installations in the immediate vicinity of national borders.

c) Hit the naval bases of Dalmatia and the Yugoslav naval units, and possibly British, in port or at sea.

d) Ensure the air protection gathered in the Alpine border areas, ports, communication lines in the Adriatic and the air bases of deployment.

Among the measures to be taken offensive against Yugoslavia, were strictly excluded air strikes on cities and towns in Croatia, whose people were considered in all respects Axis friendly.

Recognition Badges

Specified with urgent telegram P.A./Stamage n. 4709 of 04/05/1941 as a result of agreements with the Luftwaffe, established for all Italian aircraft of all specialties and for those Germanic aviation, a yellow coloration on additional engines bonnets and specifically for German planes a yellow wraparound band on the tail surface.[273]

April 1941 - armored vehicles of the 2nd Army advance in Sussak initiating operations of war against Yugoslavia. Simultaneously other Axis attacks occurred from Albania, Styria, Voivoidina, Banat and Macedonia

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Mass at the camp to the aviators of the 18th Stormo BT - For operations against Yugoslavia attended the 2nd Air Fleet, the Air Force Albania and units of the 4th Air Fleet of Puglia.

A necessary measure of an optical distinction from Yugoslav aircraft with characteristics identical to those of Italy and Germany (SM.79-Do.17-Bf. 109) previously bought.

The aircraft deployment was to be completed at 19:30 hours of April 4, 1941.

The ATTACK ON YUGOSLAVIA

Hostilities between Italy and Yugoslavia began at 06:00 on 6 April 1941 and were manifested with activities focused patrols and clashes in different parts of the front.

Particularly intense was the activity of the air reconnaissance which operated from Loibl Pass to Ljubljana, Kocevie, Dernice, Porto Re; strategic reconnaissance went up to Litja, Novo Mesto, Metlico, Karlovac, Mark, and this task was carried out by 71st group O.A. and the 36th Sqd. Air-cooperation of the army.

The objectives assigned to the bombing were the barracks and deposits of Ljubljana, railway installations and road nodes of Vrbosco, military targets in Novo Mesto, Karlovac, Ostarje, Ogulin. Cant.1007 Bis of the 4th Air Fleet bombed the airport of Mostar made a target of the Yugoslav fighter attacks that in the second afternoon raid managed to shoot down a three-engine losing by the gunners of the formation of two aircraft allegedly IK.3 type.

Bombers attacked the port facilities of Spalato where he was hit in the arsenal of Tivat and ships at anchor including a DD., a steamer and a seaplane.

Albania's air force remained watchful waiting increasing surveillance on airfields of Tirana, Durres, Berat and Devoli with protective cruises entrusted to 150th, 154th and 160th Groups C.T.

Only the 22nd Group C.T. was intended to offensive actions on airfields of Kicevo, Gostivar, Tetovo as soon as the Aeralba command would have considered appropriate in the continuation of military operations.[274]

Bersaglieri of the Zara garrison advance beyond the defensive perimeter of the fortress and capture the first Yugoslavs prisoners. The city was attacked several times by Yugoslav aviation.

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The 101st Dive Bombers Group was moved from Tirana to Scjak to decentralize part of the aircraft from the crowded airport in the Albanian capital. On the day of the 6th leaving for an attack mission on the bridge of Samobor 9 Ju.87 of 208th Sqd. Picchiatori, but failing to identify with - accuracy the area because of poor visibility, they were bombed road and fortifications in N.W. Scutari beyond the Yugoslav border. Even the offensive mission of the 22nd Group C.T. did not develop as planned because the enemy airfields were found empty presumably decentralized airplanes elsewhere. In the afternoon of the same day Yugoslav SM.79 attacked by surprise the Skadar airport without causing significant damage, having been belatedly identified for hostile aircraft by observers deceived by the familiar shape of the SIAI three-engined. The flak reaction prevented a regular sighting and this facilitated the dispersion of shooting and bombing effects.

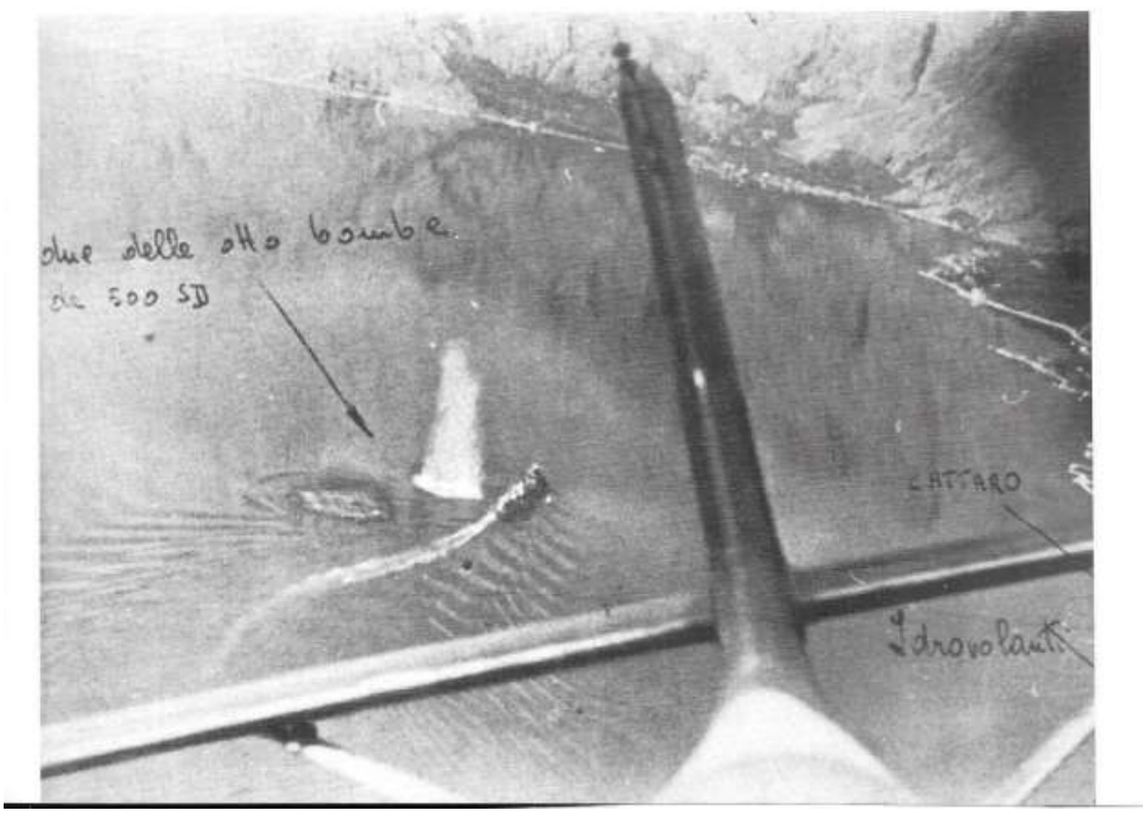
Military operations in the meantime progressed regularly. Alpine troops occupied the high valley of the Sava, a swift column headed by Bersaglieri moved on Ljubljana on which hung the imminent conquest by Germanic army "von Weiss troops."

The aviation of the 2nd Air Fleet supported the Army's movements with spare cruises and armed reconnaissance, while bombers attacked the 8th the port and railways in Sibenik, the seaplane base of Divulje, ships at the mouth of the river Krka and machine-gunned flying boats at anchor in front of Vodice.

The isolated garrison of Zadar placed on the defensive by the G.S.G. resulted surrounded by land by relevant Yugoslav forces who were pressing on the outer perimeter contained by the garrison.

It was necessary to convey to the soldiers of Zara constant and encouraging contribution of aviation presence and the Azzurra Arm did everything possible to infuse them with courage and confidence, heighten morale, admirably supporting their waiting resistance that units of the 2nd Army to free the garrison from its isolation.[275]

Attack on Yugoslav vessels in the mouths of Kotor in proximity to the seaplane of Djvulic. Two bombs of 500 Kg. Stukas launched by 101st Group, just missed the target.



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Bombing of Virpazar by the 39th Group BT of Air Force / Albania. They can see the explosion on military installations clearly visible from above.

On April 8 formations of Italian bombers flew over a more direct Zara shooting ambushes against enemies in Benkovac, Obrevac, Novigrad that were affected with good results. On the same day Yugoslavs SM.79 were attacking the port and the ships at anchor -after that the appearance of the familiar SIAI tri-motor had initially confused the defense that had mistaken them for domestic air.

On the same day a Hurricane of the J.R.V. machine-gunned at 14:15 the port and the ships moored in the channel of Zadar producing minor damage and some injuries.

In the afternoon BR.20 attacked concentrations of enemy troops between Smileic and S. Cassiano blocking offensive intentions of Zadar.

Another 9 Yugoslavs bombers attacked our peripherals positions and military targets in the city causing destructions, big fires, deaths and injuries among military and civilians.

Even national bombers then carried out attacks in the Benkovac area and the fighter escort machine-gunned enemy vehicles in transit on the Sibenik-Obrevac road.

On days 9 to 10 April the bad weather limited aerial activities but the bombers were attacking troops still on the move on the roads between Obrevac, Stradin, Benkovac and the highway from Benkovac to Bibir, the naval base of Sibenik and the submersible bastion, the depots of Rogozmica, Mandalina, Divulje and units moored in the channel between Zut and Zirje. A successful machine-gun fire destroyed a dozen seaplanes moored in Pirovac.

Macchi C.200 attacked car traffic with onboard weapons between Benkovac and Stradin and between Zemunik Donji, Novigrad, Obrovac destroying and setting fire to several vehicles. Other strafing took place in Punta Sloseila (Solta) and equipment of the seaplane base of Brac.

The 9th new offensive missions were carried out on S. Cassiano, Polesnik, while Nadin Yugoslav 3 SM.79 bombed Zadar with the launch of 40 direct bombs on military buildings, commands, barracks, depots. Moderate damage and a dozen victims among civilians and military.

The 10th Italian bombers attacked again Nadin, Zemunik Donji and Monte Croce; the next day and April 12 were targeted military objectives in Bibigne, Smilcic, Monte Croce, Benkovac.[276]

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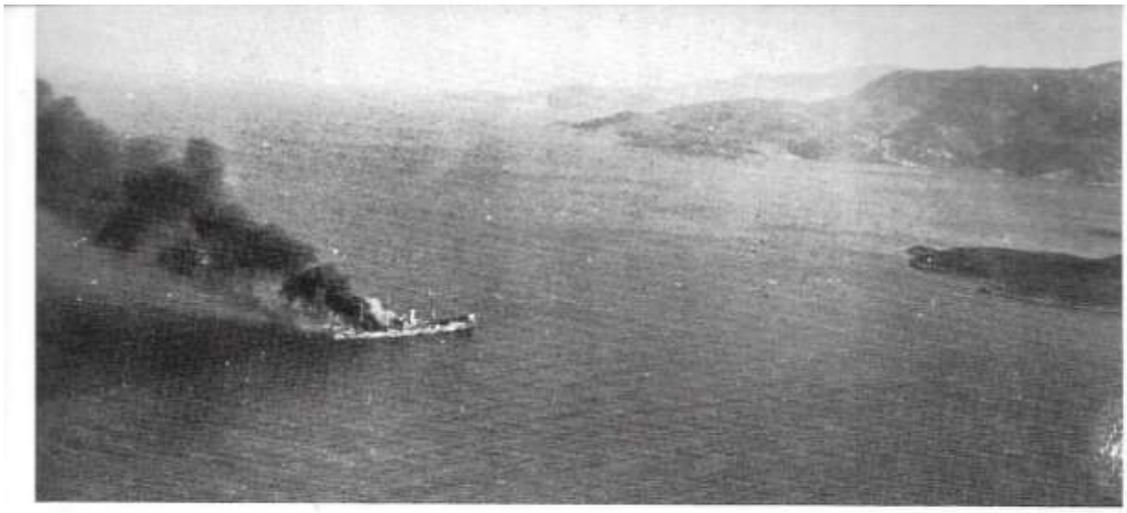

A enemy steamer hit and burning near the coast of Montenegro. The Yugoslav air force was quickly eliminated from the struggle with destructive attacks of the Luftwaffe and the RA.

The advance of the Zadar garrison units bore the employment of Zemunik Donji and the adjacent airport, the Smokovic, Opacic, Murvizza and Polja, these operations supported by fighters with machine guns on the defensive, marching columns, road centers. Macchi C.200 of 54th Stormo C.T. machine-gunned the seaplane of Trogir torching 6 seaplanes in the Punta Pirovac area. The 13th occurred the most violent air attack by the Yugoslav aviation conflict that heavily bombed the column "Morra" of the Zadar garrison moving in the village of Straza. They were reported numerous deaths and injuries.

The commander of the garrison in Gen. Giglioli in order to mitigate the psychological and moral consequences of enemy air raids, demanded from Superesercito constant surveillance of the Zadar area with fighter patrols, and G.S.G. after agreements with Superaereo to establish implementing rules and signals of recognition CCM (command Column Morra), CBZ (Bersaglieri command Zara), CFN (Infantry command Nura) and others, obtained by aviation participation of 16th Group CT designated by the command the 2nd Air Fleet with that specific operational task, which fully obtained the task to remove from the territory of Zara any further danger from the sky.

The Italian air force repeated attacks with bombers on Sibenik, the seaplane base of Divulje, Kercha, Pirovac, Ugliano, Tregj, Perkovic, Biograd, Benkovac, Bibinje, S. Cassiano, Monte Croce, Smilcic, Polya.

April 13 were occupied the towns of Smokovic, Bibinje, Ugliano, Benkovic, Rudele. There came ascertained considerable resistance in the Ocestovo area that blocked the advance made, however, difficult to an air attack that struck the Bersaglieri “Zara” Battalion causing numerous deaths and injuries.[277]

A torpedo boat of the Yugoslav Royal Navy damaged and down by the stern after a attack of Italian planes on targets of Dalmatia.

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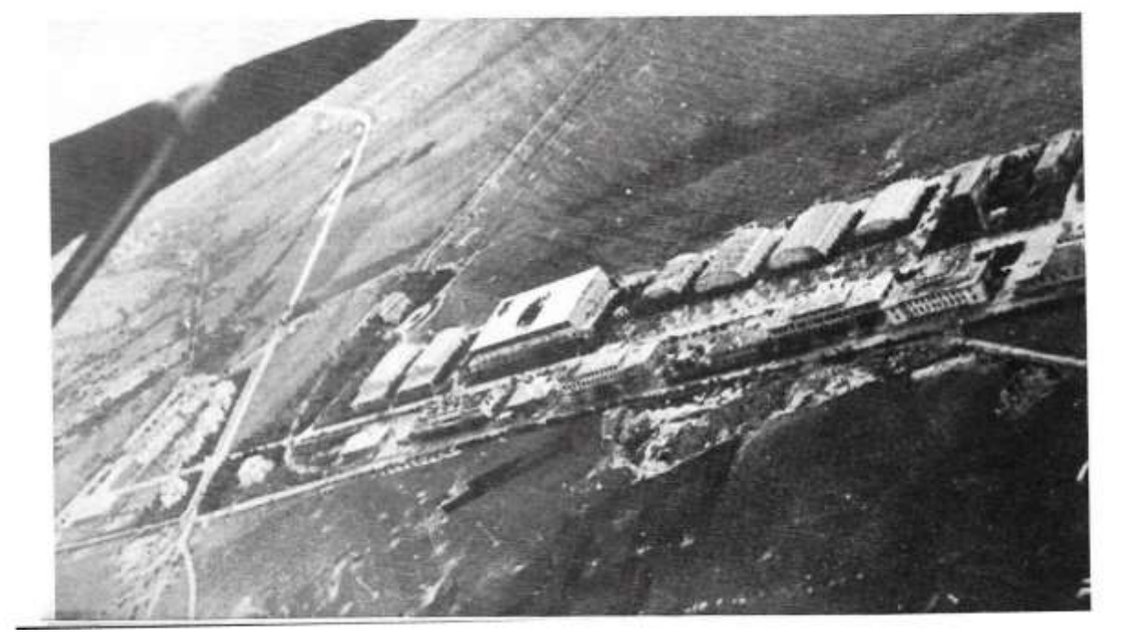
Cant. 1007Bis of 210[th] Sqd (Group 50th/16th Stormo) flying towards enemy objective. Durning the war campaign against Yugoslavia the R.A employed about 300 aircraft of all types.

The 14th after violent clashes that caused the retreat of the enemy, the soldiers Zara met the soldiers of the "Torino" from Gospic and the isolation ended.

The 239th Sqd. Picchiatori was transferred from Lecce to Jesi because of torrential rain underway in Apulia, and attacked 12 ships at the mouth of the Krka hitting effectively two torpedo boats and float planes strafing at anchor; He repeated the attack the next day insisting against ships and port facilities in Sibenik. One Stuka was damaged by anti-aircraft fire and forced to crash-land in enemy territory where pilot and gunner were captured. Another Ju.87 hit fell into the sea with the loss of the two men of crew.

On the same day fell in the Dibra area a Ro.37 the 25th Sqd. O.A. carrying the pilot Sgt. Lojacono Francesco and 2nd Lt. R.E. Oss. Enrico Theodoli. The scout who had pushed into the Yugoslav territory for a fact-finding mission, was severely damaged by anti-aircraft fire but the two valiant aviators although they had the crippled aircraft, managed to reach the Albanian territory and to launch a message with the important news before falling forever. Both are decorated with M.O.v.m. in memory.[278]

A panoramic view of Mostar airport heavily attacked by Ju 87 and MC 200, which destroyed the grounded aircraft, hangars, equipment, fuel depots and ammunition.



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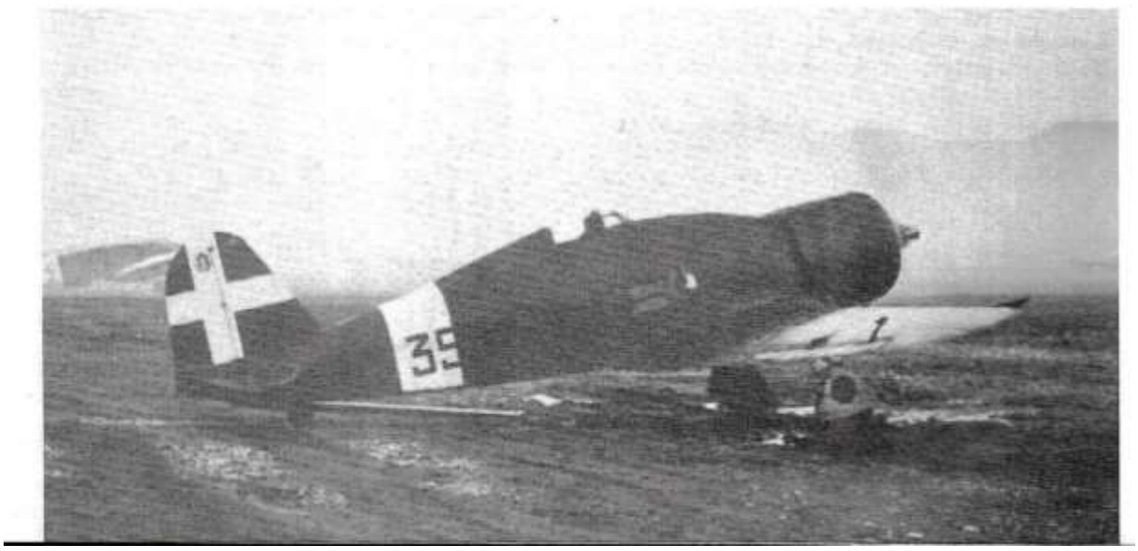
Pilots of the 152nd CT Group to report before a mission in Yugoslav territory. Note the engine hood of the MC. 200 painted in yellow color-signal recognition of Axis aircraft operating in Yugoslavia.

It was also intense activity in 101st Dive bombers Group (Maj. G. Donadio) than in the morning of the 12th took off from Tirana with 18 Ju.87 direct towards the Koraca river valley to attack Yugoslav troops marching towards the Albanian border. The attack led to the destruction of the bridges over the river between Cekania-Podgorica-Danilovgrad and Tuzi - Plauniza near Virpazar.

It was the failure of Bar bridge on the road to Podgorica because of poor visibility. Intense shooting anti-aircraft beyond the road interruption between Cekania- Podgorica and the Danilovgrad-Plauniza railway.

In the afternoon new attack on columns of baggage and strafing of vehicles running between Tuzi and direct Plauniza on the border road to Shkodra. 70 bombs were dropped SC-SP type and T 50 and 250 kg. and fired 6600 rounds cal. 7.92. One Stuka was seriously damaged. In the evening another 9 Ju.87 attacking the Podgorica-Shkoder road where passing columns of vehicles. 45 bombs dropped from 100-250 kg. and fired 5000 rounds of machine gun. The escort consists of a Squadron of the 22nd Group CT machine-gunned with MC.200 vehicles in march setting fire to 6 and continuing further north attacked the airfield Podgorica setting on fire a Blenheim, a fuel depot and a hangar.[279]

The G.50 of the 24th Group CT Commander taking off from Sculari for an offensive mission against Yugoslavia. In a few days the Axis troops destroyed the bulk of Yugoslav Army and occupied the most important areas of the country.



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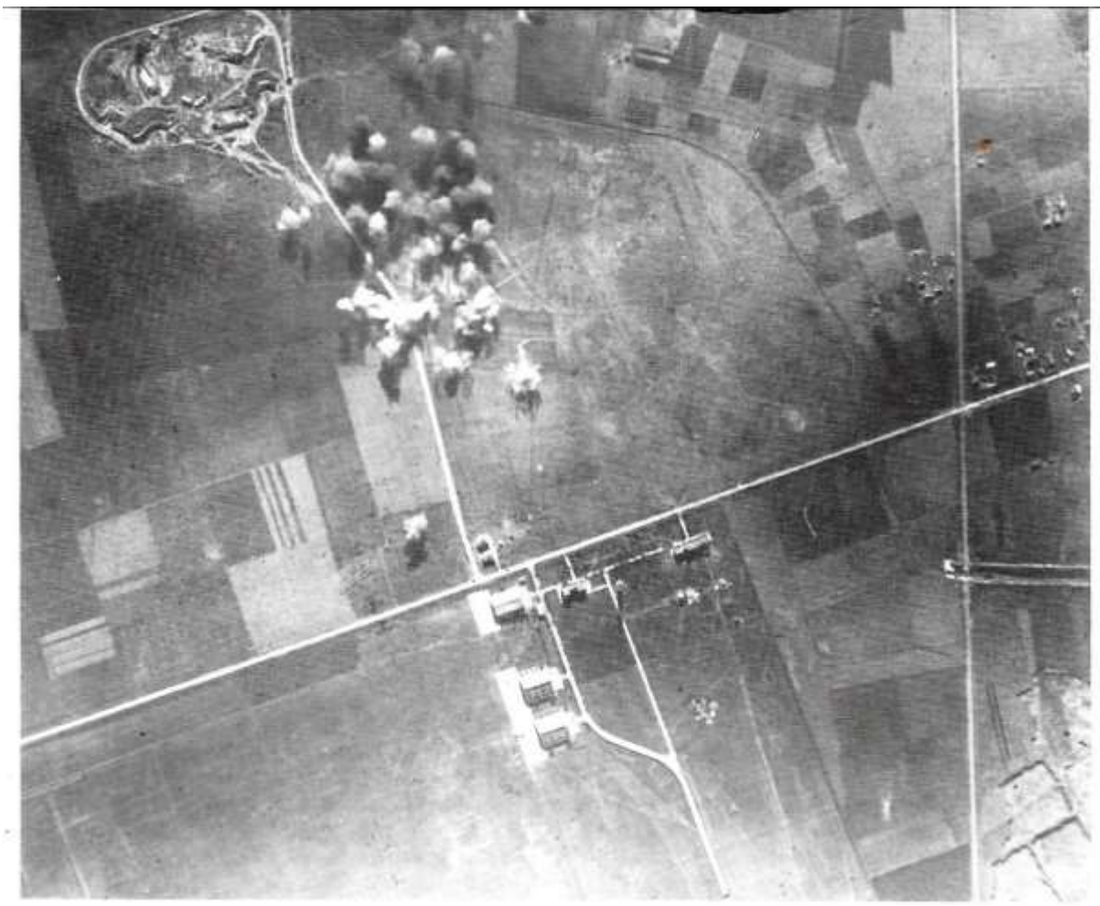

Bombing of Pudgurilza where the is center of the aircraft decentralization area

On the evening of April 12, the Yugoslav air force also made his appearance in Albania sticking with three-engined SM.79 from Niksic airfield of Durres and the auxiliary Preza. Minor damage and few casualties!

The occupation of Longatico in Val Sava, Ljubljana in Slovenia and Sussak in the Dalmatian coast took place on the day, were completed on the day following the conquest of Karlovac and smaller towns by the 12th Bersaglieri Regiment and CC.NN. units, G.d.F. and machine-gun companies.

The 13th the weather returned to definitely nice after 5 days of reduced flying activity and the R.A. exerted its best efforts employing over 300 bombers, fighters and reconnaissance planes that attacked the naval base at Kotor, the arsenal of Tivat, the seaplane base and the Gjenovic to Divulje, the fuel depots of Lipei, military installations and in Sibenik Mostar airport and Podgorica reached latter by the BR.20 of the 18th Stormo BT.

The action of Mostar was completed with a heavy attack of the 101st Group B.aT. (9 Ju.87 escorted by CR.42 of the 160th Group), with MC.200 of the 150th in free and indirect fighter escort.

Took off from Tirana and Vlora fields to the trampoline area of Shkodra, where SM.81 had carried the necessary fuel for the action, the dive bomber - fighter formation with an additional range of over 100 km moved on Mostar arrived after 45' flight time at altitude m. 4000, and to the right wing available proceeded the dive bombs going off 9 of 250 kg. and 36 of 100 hitting hangars, warehouses, workshops, equipment, fuel drums and decentralized aircraft on the vast field.[280]

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Waiting for new offensive missions "Picchiatelli" crews are allowed a bit of fun, The swooping attacks against Yugoslav targets were very effective and caused serious damage.

Soon after was the turn of the fighters that skimming machine-gunned the landing ground planes on fire, vehicles, material between the main field and the adjacent 2nd. After the fighters returned to the scene of the picchiatori who still machine-gunned the airport by firing 8300 shots, badly burning two hanger.

Another attack was carried in the afternoon by the Macchi of the 22nd Group CT. The destructive attack on the great Mostar Airport run from high altitude and dive bombers and fighters, leading to the destruction of 65 aircraft of all types -Blenheim, Hurricane, SM.79, Do.17, Breguet XIX, Bu.131 etc. - another 15 aircraft remained more or less seriously damaged.

The defense anti-aircraft initially very intense, was gradually reduced to silence after the attacks flying low, but not without severely damage the Stuka of Maj. Pilot Donadio forced to make an emergency landing in enemy territory leading to his capture along with his gunner. It was released a few days later the end of hostilities.

The 14 other bombers struck Cetinje, Podgorica and attacked the Danilovgrad-Podgorica-Plauniza railway line, these objectives entrusted to Cant.1007 and SM.79 of the 4th Air Fleet (35th and 46th Stormo BT) alternating with BR. 20 of the 2nd Air Fleet on targets designated by the higher command. During these Yugoslavs fighter missions presumably type Hurricane, they tried to intercept the bombers hampered by Macchi escort the 370th Sqd. who managed to shoot down one of the enemy fighters.

The Air Force - Albania participated in offensive missions with 101st Dive Bombers Group, which on several occasions attacked military targets reported by the O.A. at Zagorai, Antivari, Ivanay. The Ju.87 were escorted by Macchi of the 22nd Group that sighted in the sky of Cetinje a twin-engine Blenheim that felled in flames.[281]

Macchi C 200 of the 22nd Group CT are prepared for attacks against military targets Yugoslavs, The conquest of the air dominance by Italian facilitated positively military operations.

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A special mission assigned to the 101st hit with precision the command of "Kosovo" Inf. Div. located at Javanika, was entrusted to 2nd Lt. Mammano with gunner D'Agati who managed to place two bombs of 50 kg. close to the target indicated by the SIM.

The 2nd Air Fleet, who was acting as a function eminently tactic in support of the 2nd Army, supported by the bombers of the 25th Group BT the advance towards the Dalmatian coast that led on the day of the 13th the occupation of Gracac; the 14th of Knin and Sibenik, Split and the 15th Metkovic. Particularly beat the Knin area where there were troops and tanks moving.

Fighters of the 4th and 54th Stormo supported effectively advanced with strafing the streets and in residential areas, command headquarters, or where were the strongest concentrations of the Yugoslav units.

On the 17th Trebjnie, Dubrovnik and Mostar was occupied. The next rainy weather to the north blocked again the war activity of the 2nd Air Fleet while the units of the 4th Air Fleet were temporarily assigned in support of operations in Yugoslavia, were again diverted to Greece in conjunction with the start of the final objectives of the offensive which was to bring in the Superior Armed Forces command plans of Albania, to the definitive cessation of hostilities after 6 long months of war and torment.

Military operations on the Albanese- Yugoslav border were not an easy swing and on that stretch of front fought fierce clashes between Italian and Yugoslav troops.

The areas where the fighting raged the strongest was Hani Gabronit and Vernoschi, Tropoja and Shkodra area where Yugoslav troops managed to occupy some Albanians locations including Tropoja and Vernoschi. The advanced cost a very high price because the enemy formations were constantly strafed by CR.42 and MC.200 the enemy units inflicting heavy casualties, but it was necessary to evacuate the town of Kukes still reject attempts landing on Lake Skadar, fight harshly to the defense of the capital itself under nearby threat.

The clashes lasted until April 12 with ups and downs, then the 13th the Yugoslavs made their maximum offensive effort to break out of Scutari but were blocked and rejected by the tenacious defense of the "Centauro" Arm. Div. positioned to defend the road that led to Shkodra.

On April 14, a German liaison aircraft launched a message in the eastern sector of the Albanian front, indicating that German troops were close to Kukes from Stimlje-Prizren (Macedonia).

The event could not leave indifferent the Italian commands and to find the Germans our troops on the defensive and on the same day was begun an offensive rejecting the enemy units, causing losses and prisoners and created a gap in the Yugoslav side that allowed the front-reaching the Drin river and to overcome it. The 14th after more fighting victorious Italian and German troops met on the land of Macedonia and in that area the war ended.[282]

A Hawker Hurricane captured intact Italian aviation, comes to a Albanian airport Numerous aircraft were captured in Yugoslavia and used profitably by the RA.

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The three-engine SM79 with which King Peter of Yugoslavia arrive at the Niksic airport from Belgrade in his escape first to Greece and then to Egypt.

Bitter clashes occurred instead on sectors northern Albania on April 15, between armored units of the 31st Tank Regiment attack north of Shkodra and Yugoslav troops of the "Zetska" Inf. Div., of which the master asked in the late afternoon an armistice and a truce that was granted to facilitate the negotiations. In the adjacent area of the Montenegrin coast, the other Italian units continued the advance towards the north occupying the order Danilovgrad, Podgorica, Antivari and at a forced march of Ragusa.

On the day of the 16th sections of Aeralba fighters took off on alarm, intercepted a Yugoslavs formation of bombers flying into northern Albania, striking down a twin-engine Do.17 and it harmed another.

On the day of 17th the "Centauro" resumed its advance over the Albanian border occupying Niksic, whose airport some aircraft were captured including a SM.79 who had safely transported King Peter of Yugoslavia and its government, from Belgrade threatened by German troops.

Later moved to Kotor, Yugoslavia King embarked on a RAF Short "Sunderland" April 16 moved to Alexandria and later to England.

On the day of 17th Quick columns of the "Centauro" moved to Dubrovnik where it was among the internal meeting with the units of the 2nd Army from Dalmatia.

The 17th troops of the 2nd Army swept the Neretva river valley by consolidating the occupation of Herzegovina sector, while further north was completed and pacified Slovenia, defined agreements with the demarcation areas between Italy and Germany, unarmed stragglers residual of units of the Royal Yugoslav army.

April 18, Italian and German plenipotentiaries (for Italy was present Col. Bonfanti military -person) signed in Belgrade the protocol drawn up by the Axis for the unconditional surrender of Yugoslavia, the text approved by General von Weichs for Reich, entered into force at 12:00 on the same day and was fully accepted by the Yugoslav representatives Gen. Markovic and Jakovic.

By this act the campaign of Yugoslavia could be considered officially closed and definitive under every point of view.

The eastern sector of the Albanian front was at first a quiet start with clashes modest by mainly Albanian irregular bands and such waiting situation lasted until the 17th, when this area also went on the offensive aiming at Gostivar and Kicevo where armored cars columns met on the 18th Germanic armored troops from Skoplje.

More lively the war activities in the "Librashd" area who spent much on the offensive from the first day of the war by capturing prisoners and materials to the north of Lake Ohrid.

In the days following the fighting increased in intensity involving increasingly large Italian and Yugoslav units, but the unrelenting pressure of infantry and mountain leading to the conquest of the important positions of Dibra and Struga occupied under the rage of violent rain and snowstorms, and after winning the tenacious opponent's resistance.[283]

The Field Marshal von Weichs, German Armed Forces commander, Yugoslavia meets Italian military representative for negotiations armistice wings with the Yugoslavian delegates.

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Italian troops coming from Albania meet the German advance guard first from Macedonia, and Yugoslavia now finally invaded and occupied by all parties by the Axis.

On 11 April Bersaglieri motorcyclists met on highway for Ohrid the first Germanic avant-garde, and the respective G.U. commands took the arrangements for the continuation of operations in the field, by breaking down the areas of competence and the advanced limits that went on and ended the 13th with the occupation of Bilishti straddling the border area between Greece and Yugoslavia.

The German attack began on April 6, ended victoriously after just 10 days of striking and decisive war on the 16th of the same month. The Wehrmacht, attacking Yugoslavia from four directions with 20 Divisions including 7 mechanized and with the decisive support of the Luftwaffe, was successful in a week of battles and successes to crush the resistance and destroy the backbone of the Yugoslav Army into surrender.

The victorious action of the Wehrmacht had reflected positive effects for Italy, because the contrast and military clout that took the Yugoslav Armed Forces, Italian, was proportionate to the evolution of events in other areas of the Balkans and justly distributed in Axis joint effort, when one considers that in Greece the Italian army in return supported the increased commitment of the Greek commitment on Epirus and Chameria, freeing the Wehrmacht on the Macedonia sector sparsely manned by Greek units: a equal counterpart who returned very useful and beneficial to Axis committed on common fronts but far apart.

Early in the 18th occupation of Kotor was established in whose port were found in perfect working numerous Yugoslav fleet ships, including a support ship for submarines, 3 submarines, 3 seaplanes reconnaissance and 2 fighters. In the city they were unearthed the British ambassador to Belgrade Sir Ronald Campbell and the British embassy staff.

Light armor tanks of the "Centauro" type L.35 over the Yugoslav border. Strong enemy attacks on northern Albania sector were repulsed with heavy losses on both sides.

The yield provided conditions in addition to the customary guarantee and protection standards, the delivery to the Axis controls the river flotilla on the Danube at Semun, the ban on carry with enemy aircraft or neutral citizens, delivery of the fleet in the Yugoslav ports, the ban starting for merchant ships and taking off of airplanes from the fields of Yugoslavia, the delivery of equipment and intact and efficient military installations.[284]

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[284] sotto l'imperversare di violente piogge e tormente di neve e dopo aver vinto la tenace resistenza dell'avversario.

L'11 aprile bersaglieri motociclisti incontravano sulla rotabile per Ocrida le prime avanguardie germaniche, e i rispettivi comandi di G.U. prendevano gli accordi per il proseguimento delle operazioni nel settore, suddividendo le zone di competenza e i limiti di avanzata che proseguiva e si concludeva il giorno 13 con l'occupazione di Bilishti a cavallo della zona di confine fra Grecia e Jugoslavia.

L'attacco tedesco iniziato il 6 aprile, si concludeva vittoriosamente dopo appena 10 giorni di guerra folgorante e

decisiva il 16 dello stesso mese. La Wehrmacht, attaccando la Jugoslavia da quattro direzioni con 20 Divisioni di cui 7 motocorazzate e con il determinante appoggio della Luftwaffe, era riuscita in una settimana di battaglie e di successi a frantumare la resistenza e distruggere il nerbo dell'esercito jugoslavo costringendolo alla resa.

La vittoriosa azione della Wehrmacht ebbe di riflesso positivi effetti anche per l'Italia, poiché il contrasto e il peso militare jugoslavo che ebbero le FF.AA., italiane, fu proporzionato all'evolversi degli avvenimenti in altri settori dei Balcani e giustamente distribuito nello sforzo comune dell'Asse, ove si pensi che in Grecia l'esercito italiano sosteneva in compenso l'impegno maggiore dello sforzo ellenico sul fronte dell'Epiro e in Ciamuria, affrancando la Wehrmacht sul settore della Macedonia scarsamente presidiata da unità greche: una contropartita paritetica che tornò molto utile e vantaggiosa all'Asse impegnato su fronti comuni ma distanti fra loro.

Nelle prime ore del 18 veniva consolidata l'occupazione di Cattaro nel cui porto venivano trovate in perfetta efficienza numerose unità della flotta jugoslava, fra cui una nave appoggio per sommergibili, 3 sommergibili, 3 idrovolanti da ricognizione e 2 caccia. Nella città vennero scovati l'ambasciatore inglese a Belgrado Sir Ronald Campbell e il personale dell'ambasciata britannica.

Le condizioni di resa stabilivano oltre alle consuete norme di garanzia e tutela, la consegna ai Comandi dell'Asse della flottiglia fluviale sul Danubio a Semun, il divieto di trasportare con aerei cittadini nemici o neutrali, la consegna nei porti della flotta jugoslava, il divieto di partenza per le navi mercantili e il decollo di aeroplani dai campi della Jugoslavia, la consegna di impianti ed installazioni militari intatte ed efficienti.

Il 22 aprile mentre la vita in Jugoslavia si stava già da giorni avviando alla normalità, si verificava un paradossale episodio nella zona di Cattaro da 5 giorni presidiata dalle truppe italiane della Div. Ftr. «Messina », episodio che denotava ed evidenziava la farraginosa e pletorica burocrazia militare italiana, la mancanza di iniziativa ad ogni livello di comando, l'assurdo comportamento

Pilots of the 101st Group BaT check on the map targets to attack. The Italian Air Force offensive action was swift and obtained soon remarkable results in the Yugoslav campaign.

Gen. Vittorio Ambrosio commander of the Italian 2nd Army arrives with his GS. at Kotor after the end of hostilities with Yugoslavia.

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Italian Navy Infantry occupies the Dalmatian islands proceeding to disarmament Yugoslav garrisons.

On April 22, while life in Yugoslavia had already been returning to normal for days, a paradoxical episode occurred in the Cattaro area, which had been garrisoned for 5 days by Italian troops of the "Messina" Infantry Division, an episode that denoted and highlighted the cumbersome and plethoric Italian military bureaucracy, the lack of initiative at every level of command, the absurd behavior of leaders who still did not know exactly how to distinguish friends from enemies in war and act accordingly.

It was mentioned above, the precautionary detention took place in Kotor, of the English ambassador and later it occurred on the 18th, that is, even before the whereabouts of the diplomatic personnel safety in flight aboard a British submarine sent for this purpose by the command the Mediterranean Fleet in Alexandria.

The missed appointment did not discourage the commander of the submarine “Regent” Cmdr. H.C. Browne, who, on the morning of April 22 appeared in the emergence and with the Union Jack explained to the wind, at the mouth of the mouths of Kotor from Malta and with the order to take on board Sir Campbell to take him to territory under control British.

With Amazing audacity Commander Browne embarked a Yugoslavian pilot to the control point to be guided through the minefields and the routes indicated towards the jetty of Zelenika, while knowing the existing military situation in the area for several days guarded by Italian troops. Spotted and identified as an enemy ship by the RM officers, "Regent" continued navigation anchored in front of Kumbor meanwhile febrile and useless conversations took place between the local command of the Navy and Army, committed through laborious and complicated hierarchical procedures service to inform the higher command of the news and waiting for orders "how to behave" with the enemy submarine anchored a short distance from batteries and defensive positions.

While radio and wire communications were taking place and frantically waiting for a final answer from Rome that was to late, it was decided to shorten the times of decryption in cipher, to convey a clear message with a army radio station, directed simultaneously at the G.S.G.-Rome and Supermarina-Rome as follows: "Enemy submarine at Kumbor *stop* asking for aviation bombing *stop* harbor Kotor." Waiting for the response were taken some defensive measures by placing the boat barrier with nets and closing the mouth of the narrow places, arming promptly the ex Yugoslavs motor torpedo boats and submarines moored in Kumbor.

At 10:05 the commander asked Browne with the megaphone to an Italian parliamentary officer to secure the release of Sir Campbell, take him on board and set sail; the talk lasted until 10:25 when using Durazzo Harbor came a message, Chief of G.S.G. Gen. Cavallero, who was tracked down and bothered for the occasion, by the unusual event, logically ruled by "capturing the enemy ship."[285]

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Mostar - a three-engine SM 79 of the Royal Yugoslav Air Force destroyed on the ground by Italian an air strike. La R.J.A.F. He had access to modern flight material supplied by Italy, Germany & England.

Followed a radio message of Gen. Zani commander at "Messina" directed Supermarina, stated that the start of negotiations with the "Regent" and asked for information and instructions in this regard. The strange deal was a precautionary followed by an exchange of Anglo-Italian hostages taken care of by a Italian Navy Leut.: a 2nd Lt. infantry would dare to embark on the "Regent" - a Lt(jg). of the "Regent" would be landed on the ground. The exchange of hostages took place with regularity and great seriousness. Then the Air Force decided to end the event also prompted by the Armed Forces High Command Albania.

At 12:10 three Ju.87 of the 208th Sqd. Diver Bombers under the command of Capt. Carlos Bertuzzi assisted as an observer by Lt. Fasan, appeared in the sky of Kotor, sighted and identified as an enemy the "Regent" but had to desist from the attack by the presence of numerous vessels and persons on board and sensed that the negotiations continued. The attack in similar conditions could not be carried out and at 12:50 the 3 Ju.87 landed at Scutari waiting for new orders.

It was necessary to wait until 14:00 when they arrived precise and unambiguous instructions from the Aeronautica Albania command, which logically and wisely decided to permanently sever the absurd situation. A few minutes later two Stukas with the crews Beltuzzi-Fasan and 2nd Lt. Caravaggio- Sgt. Bedoya took off to search for and no hesitation to bomb the enemy submarine. At 14:45 the two dive bombers were on the Kumbor sky and m. 3000 brought with swooping against the “Regent” by releasing 10 bombs of 50 kg. and 2 250 which exploded close to the submarine, damaging it; He followed a skimming pass with on-board weapons, firing shots at the boat 845 cal. 7,92 mm. and at 15:35 the two Stukas landed in Tirana. An hour after the bombing, Supermarina sent via Stamage for Superesercito a telegram: "refuse parliamentary, destroying the submarine as specified by General Cavallero at 12:25," but at that time the “Regent” that luck had blatantly assisted since the morning, was sailing in diving in the Adriatic after 9-hour stay in a port controlled by the enemy and carrying a disoriented infantry officer from the "Messina."

Damage sustained by the bombardment had not adversely affected the seaworthiness of the vessel. The submarine was long sought in the following days but to no avail while sailing to Malta.

There was at Stamage an investigation but the incredible episode was already happened and everything was rightly silenced.

Sir Campbell and later were transferred a few days later to Italy with the SAS aircraft and finally repatriated via Spain-Portugal in the prescribed international conventions for the Diplomatic Corps.

CONCLUSIONS

The intervention of the Royal Air Force in the campaign of Yugoslavia was very effective and had a positive impact for the duration of the operations, both with direct tactical support to the G.U. of the Army, either as aircraft used for actions against aviation aimed at eliminating the enemy airpower.[286]

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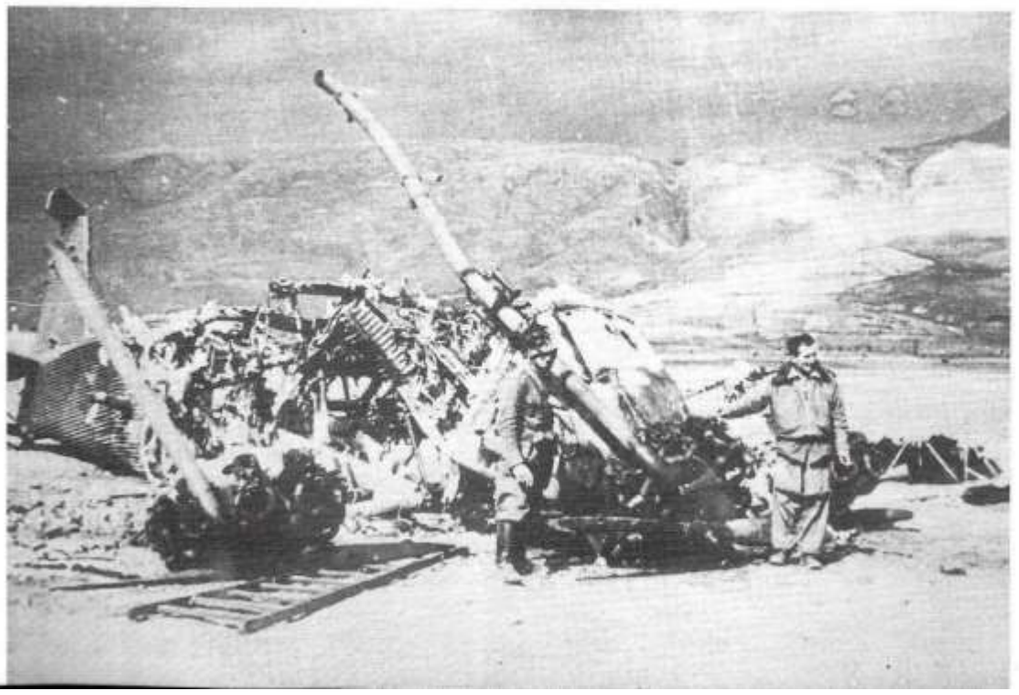
Yugoslav war material captured by Italian troops at the end of the victorious campaign. The Yugoslav army quickly disbanded, but thousands of men went into hiding with weapons and materials.

On the Podgoritza airfield a pilot and a Bersagliere pose next to the burned carcass of a Junker, W 34 destroyed in a attack of Italian hunting on April 12.



The limited extension of the assigned objectives to R.A. with the Italian-German agreements before April, results were perhaps initially reduced, but what was there Yugoslav aviation was hit hard in the early days with the successful conquest of the dominion of the heavens, who had neutralized any ambition offensive: to bring the aerial offensive on the Italian territory. In 10 days of war the Italian air force had eliminated 25 percent of air potential between enemy aircraft destroyed on the ground or in combat and those captured intact at the time of surrender. They included Do.17 and SM.79, Ca.310-311, Hurricane, Bf.109, Rogožarski, P.V.T. and Fizir, SIM XIV seaplanes, airplanes Breguet XIX, Potez XXV, Ikarus IK.2, Dewoitine D.27, Hawker Fury, Bucker 131, Dornier Wal aircraft and other outdated features; and also an intact SM.79 (former Yugoslav T.P. of the royal house), another SM.79 captured by the Hungarians and exchanged with 2 CR.42.

Among the seaplanes were noted:

2 SIM XII with Walter engine, 1 Heinkel 59, 3 Ikarus, 6 SIM XIV with Ardis engine, 4 Fizir with Jupiter K9 engine, 2 PVT with Jupiter K7 engine, 2 VaI with Jupiter K9 engine, 2 with RR70 and 2, with Hispano Suiza, 2 DOC with BMW engine, 4 De Havilland 'Moth', 1 DOC HS engine, 2 Flit, Cyclone engine and 29 spare engines of the BMW type, HS, Piaggio P. VII, Lorraine Dietrich, Mercedes Benz, Argus, Jupiter.

BOMBING, FIGHTER AND RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT USED AGAINST YUGOSLAVIA

acts of war carried out	n. 1822
national aircraft lost for war causes	n. 5
enemy aircraft destroyed, shot down in combat and A/A	about a hundred
Total flight hours	n. 2646
BOMBING	
tactical support missions strategic -objectives	n. 241
flight hours	n. 560
Bombs and pieces thrown	tons 2002
fired machine guns	n. 13188
Missions at sea and naval bases	n. 190
flight hours.	n 464
Bombs dropped in sea missions - naval base	n. 890
strategic reconnaissance	n. 28
flight hours	n. 148
Missions suspended due to bad weather	n. 25
Total employed aircraft	n. 482
FIGHTERS	
Surveillance cruises	n. 707
flight hours	n. 320
departures on alarm	n. 23
flight hours	n. 42
tactical support missions	n. 180
flight hours	n. 304
strafing missions on the ground	n. 296
flight hours	n. 171
fired machine guns	n. 112,000
tactical reconnaissance	n. 29
flight hours	n. 46
missions suspended due to bad weather	n. 5
Total employed aircraft	n. 1,240[287]

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OBSERVATION AIRCRAFT

Reconnaissance in view -photographs	n. 67
flight hours	n. 140
tactical cooperation missions	n. 4
flight hours	n. 6
strafing - bombing missions (Kg. 4464 clips -24,500 shots fired)	n. 32
flight hours	n. 48
missions suspended due to bad weather	n. 16
Total employed aircraft	n. 119

LOSSES

	losses suffered	losses inflicted
Bombing	5	2
Fighters	-	3
aerial reconnaissance	1	1

(About a hundred destroyed on the ground)

CREW LOSS

	Injured	fallen
Pilots	2	1
NCOs pilots	3	1
NCOs -graduati specialists	7	3
Total	12	5[288]

A airplane bombs depot found in a Yugoslav Air Force warehouse.

The British diplomatic mission in Yugoslavia, including the ambassador Sir Campbell and naval attaché and a soldier, waiting to board an Italian plane that will transport them to neutral Switzerland.

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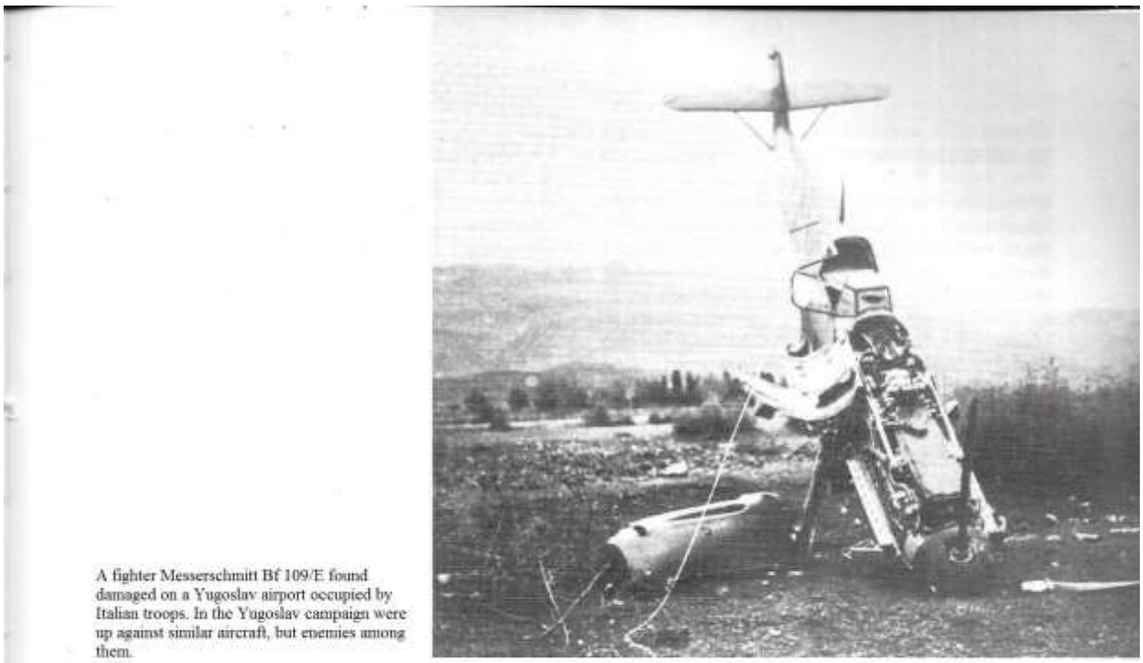


A fighter Messerschmitt Bf 109/E found damaged on a Yugoslav airport occupied by Italian troops. In the Yugoslav campaign were up against similar aircraft, but enemies among them.

The remains of a modern twin-engine Dornier Do. 17 Yugoslav aviation destroyed to the ground by Italian aircraft.

GREECE SURRENDERS TO THE AXIS

The final offensive that was to finally decide the fate of Greece, saw a further commitment of G.S/RA not to miss the crucial moment of the war, the aviation contribution as always decisive, in the brotherhood of arms with efforts to long months of war had supported the infantry in that tormented battle front.

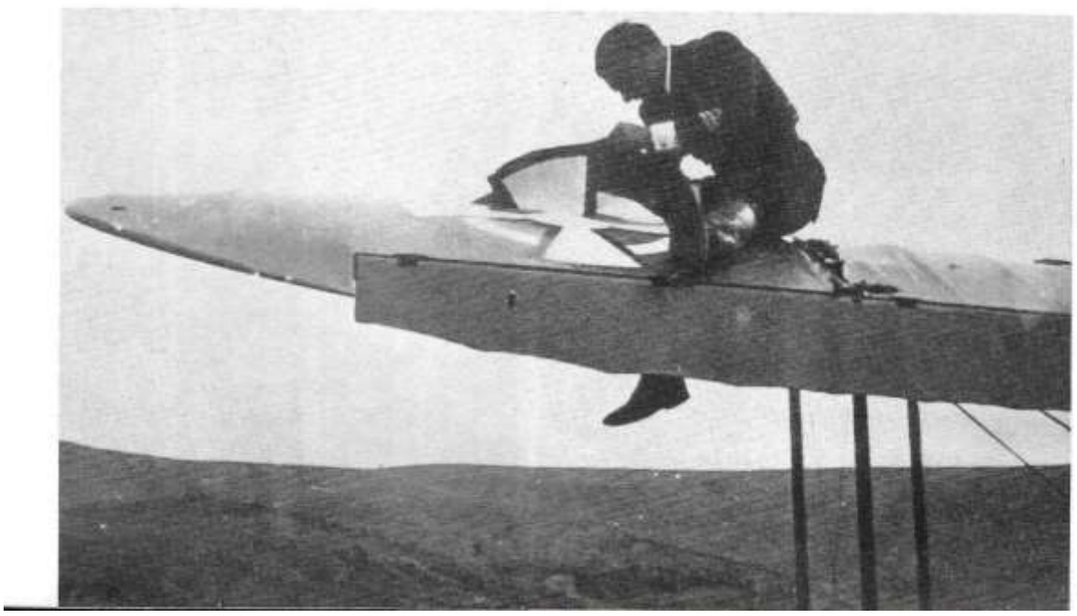
It was then guaranteed to Superalba strengthening tactical air force necessary to support the offensive of the troops, thus greatly easing the operations on the difficult mountainous Albania's front and the Epirus.

In addition to 208th Sqd. of dive bombers, for processing into assault of CR.42 and strengthening of the O.A., by sending the 35th Sqd. in addition to the 87th; previously transferred to Albania, the command Air Force for Albania saw fit not to further saturating the airfields intended for the tactical unit employment and moved on the airport of Foggia the veteran 38th Stormo BT now equipped completely with BR.20M and the remaining 104th Gruppo of the 46th Stormo BT remained in Tirana after the effective transfer to Bari of the twin 105th. Also the 4th Air Fleet was further strengthened with the assignment of the 13th Stormo BT with BR.20M, started to Gioia from Colle after its return to Italy from Belgium and its reorganization, necessary for the unit that had operated in England in the ranks of the CAI; was assigned to the 4th Air Fleet also the 356th Sqd. CT of MC.200 for the defense of Bari, while the 8th Group CT returned to the homeland for recovery of organic after tough battle sustained in North Africa, as new material received the Macchi C.200 and simultaneously advised of a coming transfer to Puglia.

Enemy tactical targets that were made many times the target of bomber raids were the positions in front of our deployment in Albania: Guri i Topit, Tega, Coritza, Pogradec and then the railway stations of Florina, Larissa and Thessaloniki, the lines of communication towards the front and on the ports where flowed with ships and cargo vessels the necessary supplies for the troops at the front.

Particularly important are the destruction of bridges on the rivers, Arkadeika (Kiparissia), Kalama (Doliana and Perati) struck precisely by Stukas; decisive tactical aviation action smashed local attacks in the area of the 9th Army and the Scutarino, with machine guns and bombing and support actions to advance our troops to Dibra and Ohrid, and to start the day on April 15, also in the Koritsa sector where it was reoccupied Coritza. [289]

Souvenir hunter at work. An officer of the Italian aviation crop conscientiously the cockade of RJAF painted on the wing of a captured Breguet biplane.



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Other attacks took place against ships in coastal shipping in the Butrint area, the port of Piraeus, on Larissa airports (Advanced RAF) Yanina, Paramithia, (FAA based with "Swordfish") Corfu where it was burned a steamer of 3000 GRT. and 4 enemies fighter aircraft shot down in aerial combat. A steamer was sunk in the port of Piraeus.

The order to resume the offensive with the Greek army had been given by General Cavallero by the end of March and included a limited offensive, first to the sectors of the IV and VIII Army Corps, and later the entire 9th Army in the direction of Bilishti, which would be added a few days later also the collateral action of the 11th Army. In this way the whole Italian deployment would take to the offensive, to set up and conduct what would eventually become the decisive battle of the Italian-Greek campaign.

The attack plan called for: a breakthrough in the Skumbini sector towards the right side of Lake Ohrid in order to prevent the union of the Greek and Yugoslav troops; conquest through Bilishti, the Kapestiza narrows between Koritsa and Macedonia; then point to the efforts of Ponte Perati, junction of Kalibaki, Erseke, to circumvent opposing Greek forces. The two armies had to move along the following lines: 9th Army-Bilishti-Bridge Perati-Kalibaki; 11th Army Vojussa-Dhrino-coast.

First Italian final offensive, the Greeks launched two sudden attacks in the area of Teqe (of Tomori group hill. 1625) and in front of Guri i Topit-Kollak conquering both locations after violent clashes in melee.

Four hours later the conquest of hill 2120 Guri i Topit as a result of determined and deadly intervention of Stukas of the 101st Group in the enemy was forced to leave the town after suffering heavy losses. The aviation intervention was decisive!

On 13 April, the 9th Army began its offensive by deploying Inf. Divs. "Venezia", "Forlì" and "Taro" in the front row on the left; "Piedmont", "Parma" and Alpine “Tridentine” equally in the line on Devoli, and preparing the "Pinerolo" truck mounted, for rapid penetration into the Lake Ohrid area.

The offensive action had finally success and the enemy tried hard ceded their positions to the impetus of our soldiers on the evening of April 20, after a week of hard, bloody fight on the mountains, the valleys, the ridges of the Koritsa. Two days before the serious situation in which they now found Greece, the Head of the Greek Government Dr. Koryzis committed suicide in Athens.

Early in the morning of the 22nd Bersaglieri motorcyclists of the 26th Battalion. that preceded the Lancieri di Milano, they threw themselves boldly on Vojussa to reach the famous bridge that Perati much blood had flowed to the mountain of the "Julia" in the fatal November 1940, taking with their bikes roaring the coveted goal has always desired and which has become a symbol to the valor of the Italian soldiers, but they had the daunting surprise to find on the opposite bank of the river a rigid Feldwebel of Feldgendarmerie belonging to the SS. Leib Standarte "Adolf Hitler." The town had been occupied the night before by a German column of the "Fuhrer's personal guard" who had come up the river from Gianina!

The 11th Army committed in the ranks divisions "Puster" alpine, "Cacciatori delle Alpi", "Cagliari", "Siena", "Bari", "Sforza", "Legnano", "Lupi di Toscana", "Ferrara ","Casale", the CC.NN. "Galbiati" Grouping and even "Modena", "Brenner", "Cuneo", "Julia", reconstituted and as always fierce and valiant, "Acqui", all G.U. acting on the mass of the whole vast field facing assigned, ranging from Mali to Trebescines, by Scialesi in Klisura, from Premeti to Vojussa, by Scindelj to Kurvelesch, to Golico.

In the waterfront area were recaptured Himara and Port Palermo and the Italian troops entered again after six months of fighting in the Greek territory.

On the day of the 22nd the vanguard of the "Bari" met with the troops of the 9th Army, while the numerous Greek divisions which are between the two Italian armies and pressed from behind by German troops have no alternative but to surrender was going to evening of April 22, 1941. The battle of Epirus had victoriously ended with the surrender to Italian arms.[290]

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On the evening of the 20th Greek troops of Macedonia (four Inf. Div. and smaller units) had asked for an armistice to the Germanic Armed Forces, which even accepting it had expected the victorious conclusion of Epirus battle started by the Italians, to define with integrity and formalism with forwarding mode that occurred in Delvinaki at 19:30 on 22 April and were confirmed the next day in Thessaloniki in the presence of representatives Italian, German and Greek, where Gen. Tsolakoglou top commander of the Greek Army of Epirus and Macedonia, officially demanded the unconditional surrender of his troops, signed in an agreement providing military honors for officers, the release of Axis prisoners (more than 20,000 Italian soldiers), the gradual return of the Greek prisoners of war at the end of war operations, delivery of arms, ammunition and Greek Army materials including aeronautical material - ground equipment, naval vessels and merchant and other general conditions. The surrender was signed on April 23 at 14:45 hours in addition to the Greek commander, by Field Marshal Jodl for Germany and Gen. Ferrero for Italy.

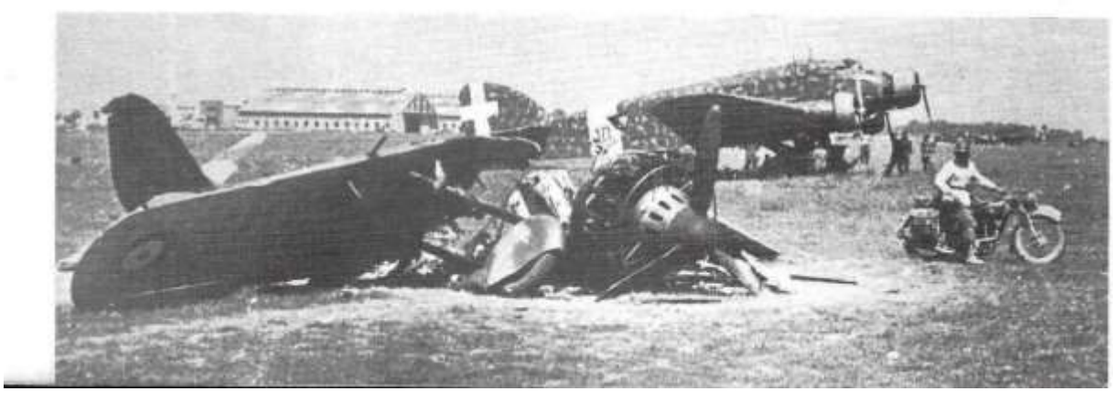
The victorious conduct of military operations the Air Force had offered once again his decisive contribution with the presence of about 180 bombers in action every day in early April, gradually brought to 300 at the beginning of the offensive on April 10 and finally to over 400 in the second decade of the month, after some units moved to the operations against Yugoslavia started it on April 6, returned to the jurisdictions of the Air Force in Albania and 4th Air Fleet - which profitably employed them in the final phase of the war against Greece (37th Group BT, 8th Group CT, 150th Group CT, 101st Group BaT).

The contribution of the Force to the Army Air operations focused on areas facing and the 9th and 11th Armies and the Coast Grouping, with the bombing, strafing and continued to hit and crack the fierce resistance of the brave and admirable Hellenic infantry, real star of the mountains of Greece and of war Albania, which resisted even when the threat was looming behind him with penetration - Greek territory of the German mechanized forces from Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, these forces who had crossed the front advancing towards Thessaly, Macedonia, Morea and the Peloponnesus, isolating the face of Northern Epirus and Macedonia which were concentrated against Italy with 16 Greek divisions of the 21 mobilized.

The last air force attacked targets on the front included names, repeatedly hit locations: Gianina, Preveza, Corfu, Leskovici, Barmaschi, Borosani, Konitza, Kakavia, Louron, Pjilippias, Delvinaki and then all roads behind the front on which attempting to withdraw the Greeks now fought between Borova, Kuci, Golem, Perati, Katcicat, on whose field were set on fire the last PZL still remaining to the Greek air force, until such time as the Hellenic Army of Epirus and Macedonia, 16 divisions strong and more than 250,000 men and certainly the most important for organic and consistency of all the Greek Army, surrendered their weapons after more than six months of hard struggle.

The Italian commitment cost 13,502 dead, 38,768 injured, 17,477 frost bitten for only the Royal Army, had blocked the borders with Albania, the bulk of the Hellenic Armed Forces, which had inflicted heavy losses, allowing Germany to promptly proceed and without particular difficulties his mechanized units to the heart of Greece, contrasted by a few modestly Greek units and the bulk of the British expeditionary Corps in Greece which will be fought at Thermopylae and forced to re-embark with heavy losses in men, materials and military and merchant shipping.[291]

The first Italian aircraft arriving on the field of Larissa just occupied by the Axis. On the left a Hellenic Aviation PZL destroyed to the ground by the RA attacks. The Greek air force came out of the war completely destroyed.



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Losses suffered by RAF fighters and bombers in the Greek campaign, as described in a report of the Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac were 198 aircraft of all types were lost for war causes (corresponding to about 200 British aircraft reported to be knocked down by the RA - editors note) 85 percent of them by the RA against killing 42 Italian Air Force inflicted largely credited to air strikes and fighters in small part to anti-aircraft fire. The total of losses is to add the complete destruction of the Hellenic Air Force.

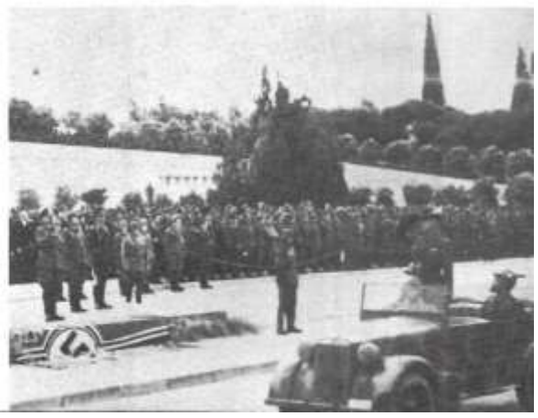
AIR TRANSPORT IN THE GREECE WAR

From the beginning of the campaign in Greece he showed the urgent need to urgently transfer the required accessories from Italy for infantry units engaged in the battle, after the bitter realization of the inadequacy of the Italian army divisional workforce that did not allow substitutions, alternations and reinforcements to the only two infantry regiments available in the unit and employees with all their actual, while considering objectively the table of organization of a CC.NN. Battalion additional to the standard Infantry Division. This finding of inadequate potential was at the origin and as a contributory cause, the bad weather and the lack of recognizance of the initial attack success and severely compromised in a short time and the actual resistance of the units deployed to the front now worn and tired. In such dramatic circumstances and the conviction to continue the offensive, the C.S.T.A. demanded the G.S./RA send urgent reinforcements from Italy and the State of the Air Force by the SAS, immediately put in place every possible solution to comply with dramatic plea for reinforcements, is the even more urgent and dramatic plea to supply with air drops units remained isolated by the enemy and the weather inclemency among the mountains of Epirus.

The lack of prospects and the logistics of employed many forms of vision of adequate air component of transport with autonomous characteristics within the RA, had created since the occupation of Albania in 1939 and at the beginning of the war, a number of serious problems which it had not yet been adequately resolved at the time of the opening of the new front in Albania. The workforce of the SAS, whose leadership had been called Gen. D.A. Aurelio Leotta, were still based on the Stormo of formation constituted at Orvieto on April 21, 1940, which transport unit available to the G.S./RA for logistical needs, with a range of heterogeneous aircraft, assigned then to 3 groups T made in the meantime: 147th, 148th, 149th for months now committed to their maximum potential in large part to link services with far E.A. and the continuing N.A. and Aegean needs. [292]

Athens-Italian Soldiers pay tribute to the unknown Greek soldier. A proper recognition to the value and the opponent's tenacity that he had fought with great firmness to defend his country on the Albanian border.

Athens-Victory Parade for the Axis troops. The commander of the unconquered "Julia" greets the Field Marshal von List of honor on the stage. The glorious Alpine Division was the great protagonist in the initial phase of the war with Greece.



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Arriving on the field of Larissa Germanic military mission for armistice negotiations with Greece. Gen. Efisiu Marras military attaché in Berlin.

With MS. 79 January piloted by Gen. Sozzani deputy commander "Air Force of Albania". come to Larissa also the Italian delegation to discuss the terms of the armistice with the Greek authorities.

Formation of Stukas of the VIII Fleger Korps (Gen. von Richthofen) flying over the sky of the Greek capital during the parade of Victory. The 4th Luftfloltte was decisive with his power to resolve the conflict with Greece and Yugoslavia.

Only with considerable organizational efforts it was possible to divert part of the SAS aircraft available to be assigned to the new front, properly integrating them with a transport wing (Geschwader Transport) with Ju.52 requested and obtained quickly from G.S./RA to Stabs-Luftwaffe.

At the same time the measures that the command enacts SAS in Italy, the Air Force command to the Albania pressed by C.S.T.A. recovered urgently all Ca.133/T technical support supplied to fighter and bombing units employed, integrating them with 6 MS. 81 bombers had from 38th Stormo BT which were assigned to the new autonomous squadron from Aeralba transport with headquarters in Tirana formed specifically, adapting to the new necessities of use after removing the equipment for the bombs and aiming equipment and some side machine guns.

With a dozen of these aircraft scraped together in this way, can then turn was no time wasted the first transport of troops from Italy, air dropping urgent supplies to the units of the front, airlift promptly, units of reinforcement, ammunition, food, medicines, fodder, heavy clothing. Altogether, until the end of November, they were dropped 94 tons of materials in inaccessible areas of Epirus, on the massif of Pindos, in the areas of Briaza and Limen, on unfamiliar mountain heights only visible on tactical cards, braving the inclement weather and poor visibility, thrusting dangerously, with heavy three-engined in narrow valleys, repeatedly flying over mountain ranges looking for a slender agreed signal, represented by a colored towel signaling or conventional smoke with aircraft frequently subjected to automatic weapons fire infantry or heavy rapid-fire Derlikon gun, risking crashing often against an unseen ridge hidden by low cloud cover. Between November 4, the day began emergency air dropping service at the front and 28 February 1941, by the command of the Air Force transport aircraft Albania They carried more than 200 missions and dropped a quantity of materials superior to 240 tons.[293]

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Brindisi 07/05/1941 - Victor Emanuele III embarks from royal three-engine I-ESTO for his visit to Albania to crown the victorious conclusion of the war against Greece / Yugoslavia.

As he started and continued this singular but valuable service by air supplies, began to arrive regularly from Italy the first reinforcements of infantry, artillery, alpine, CC.NN., Bersaglieri and engineers through the SAS, the Luftwaffe and the Nuclei of links planes, also mobilized for the occasion, aided in part by regular lines of aircraft used to the usual connections between Italy and Albania.

Air links with Albania have previously managed from the Ala Littoria, they had been confirmed and assured from the beginning of the war by N.C.A.L. (Ala Littoria) who had intended 4 SM.75, while for domestic flights had been formed specifically the 611th Sqd.T (Lt. C. Amoroso) which operated with 5 twin-engine Ba.44 capable of 6-8 seats each -but able to link small town landing on small fields.

The regular service of N.C.A.L., three times a week, and were available seats (30-34 for SM.7 5) were assigned by the SAS command little at civilians with a share allocated to civilian and military officials and the needs of the Armed Forces

The inability to allocate the full accommodation capacity of civil aircraft for, and requirements of the Armed Forces, advised the SAS in agreement with the G.S./RA command, assigned to the transport requirements for Albania other 10 twin-engine provided by NAI of the Aviolinee Italiane, including Fiat G.18/18V and 2 DC.2-DC.3 (the latter a former Sabena confiscated) joined by a small twin-engine VIP Fiat APR.2 with 8-10 seats available.

These excellent aircraft soon began shuttle service between Foggia and Tirana, linking effectively in an uninterrupted shuttling with an average rate of 4-6 daily trips and loading capacity of 20-24 soldiers armed and ready for flight, the Albanian side and Italy and vice versa. In the course of transport operations it was lost for technical reasons Fiat G.18V I-ELIO and were damaged by the accidents I-ETRA and the I-ERME.

Different and less conspicuous was the very useful work done and appreciated by Ba.44 militarized in Albania, whose structural and technical characteristics (twin-engine biplanes) allowed rendition flights in congenial form near the front and landings of small grass fields.

On several occasions made use of the small twin-engine the Chief of the G.S./RA Gen. Pricolo and Commander of Aeralba Gen. Ranza, Gen. Visconti Prasca of C.S.T.A., and other commanders of the army, including the last period of the war Gen. Cavallero, Chief of G.S.G and commander of the armed forces of Albania. They do not, however, lack accidents.[294]

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A Cant 506 190th Sqd. of the coast of Corfu over flown at low height with protective and support aircraft. After long discussions, the Greek authorities gave all powers to Col. Grande who had made the operation.

On March 9, 1941 fell on take-off in Tirana with a Ba.44 registered I-ORSA and killed the pilot 2nd Lt. Basile, Av.Sc. Mot. Grando and Lt. CC.RR. Carmagnano on board as a passenger. Another incident that could have very serious consequences occurred instead on April 15, when two Ba.44 I-AURA (Lt. Amoroso) and I-EURO (Sgt. Porzio) carrying military and civilian personal including the Cons. Nat. Farinacci and Tecchio, Gen. Ranza, senior officers of the army, of the R.A. and the CC.RR. for a total of 13 people, rose in flight from Tirana to Coritza restored after five months by the Italian troops, they were intercepted by mistake in the vicinity of Lake Ohrid, some CR.42 of the 160th Group CT (399th Sqd. Capt. Arcangeletti) who they had allegedly mistook them for British twin-engine De Havilland 86 type "Dragon Fly" (the Ba.44 was an exact copy of this English twin-engine - Note) and attacked with on-board weapons. The two twin-engine tried in every possible way to be recognized and identified, taking to the lower altitudes, but in this lifesaving technique were also framed by anti-aircraft gunner shot of the army and struck in several places. Pilots with skillful and fortunate maneuvers, however, were able to take land on a flat stretch where I-EURO caught fire immediately after all the passengers bruised but unharmed had abandoned it, while luckier was that while the I-AURA causing serious damage not caught fire and was evacuated by passengers were fortunately unharmed among the many dangers in the dramatic adventure.[295]

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Poor lighting conditions, the resemblance to similar enemy models and the camouflage of the aircraft, similar in service also Hellenic aviation had in various sizes contributed to engender the misunderstanding between the Italian fighter pilots in identifying the two transport airplanes.

At the beginning of 1941 the G.S./RA provided appropriately to reclassify all three-engine SM.81 bombing into transport aircraft, initially assigning planes load of 38th Stormo BT to SAS command and replacing them with twin-engine BR.20M, it was simultaneously newly formed 145th Group T, assigning the transport specialties pilots and specialists from the 18th Stormo BT of which had been decided urgently transformation into transport Stormo.

For the need of the Albanian front Command SAS permanently assigned squadrons 605th - 606th with SM.73, 601st-602nd of SM.75 and 149th Group T with SM.82 although the unit was partly engaged in transport with E.A. Altogether they were made available for the Albania sixty three-engined SIAI of various types, a dozen twin-engined Fiat and other brands, thirty former SM.81 bombers that operated as a base by Foggia and Brindisi airports to Tirana, Vlora and Devoli, while for domestic flights to the airports of the opposite: Coritza, Gjirokastra and Drenova acted the SM.81-Ca.133/T of the autonomous squadron transporting Aeralba, sixty Luftwaffe Ju.52.

In this intensive transport activities, organized as a real "air bridge", there had been some incidents of which only one with serious consequences that caused the death of the crew and all the soldiers who were on board. On 16 November a three-engine SM.73 of the 605th Sqd. piloted by Lt. Visca on landing in Vlora was collided with a parked SM.82; the two aircraft remained damaged even if they should not complain victims; the 19th of the same month a SM.73 the 606th Sqd. piloted by Lt. Marinelli taking off from Coritza bumped as a result of yaw due to the soft ground a row of CR.42 parked on the sides of the track, seriously damaging them and causing serious damage to the point that the tri-motor put under repair to the local SRAM will be abandoned at the time of the evacuation of the camp for the Greek advance. On the same day occurred the most disastrous accident in the activity of airborne war in Greece, where the SM.73 registered 605-2 piloted by Lt. Scarani with 2nd pilot Lt. Nessi and with 1st Av. Mot. Forcati, taking off from Brindisi to Vlora with 24 soldiers aboard of the Regiment in 207th Inf. "Taro" plunged immediately - after taking flight probably for locking a lateral control rod caught unawares by a soldier. The plane skidded sideways unbalancing the load and fell to the ground, killing all the occupants.

A proper recognition in the largest airlift arranged to send reinforcements in Albania, is bestowed to air transportation units from the Luftwaffe that operated between Tirana and Foggia with a total of 63 three-engined Ju.53/3m belonging to KG.zb VI (zur besonderen Verwendung - special employment) Col. Morzik, a battle wing with 4 organic groups improperly called that, which retained the original name of use even if by this time had changed in the transportation and was endowed with great military experience operations in Norway, Holland and France. Arranged on the two groups I and III places to technical command of Col. von Gablenz (an experienced commander of Lufthansa) the GT.1 came from Wetzendorf and had come to Foggia "Gino Lisa airport" in early December ready to operate within a few days. The Group I (Lt. Col. Rudolf Starke) had organically three squadrons respectively located under the command of Lt. Mueller, Crolman and Zadler, while the III Group (Maj. Hammer) had as many squadrons assigned to Capt. Fath and to Lts. Dudek and Wittisch.

Chief of Staff of the unit was Maj. Neundlinger. Denominated by the G.S./RA "Trasgerma Group", he had traveled a total of 2,496,000 km. in 3326 for flights operating uninterruptedly 59 consecutive days and suspending one day missions to severe weather conditions, with an average pilot flown that went from 49 to 74 flights; He had a staff of 21 officers and 194 non-commissioned pilots, 214 NCOs and graduated many specialists, who had been proposed for the Italian military valor decorations.

To start from 8th December, the Transport Geschwader z.b.V. began his service in "Albania Luft Brucke" accurately and regularly throughout Teutonic, to the point that they had not complained of incidents arose unless of technical capacity during the 4028 transport missions undertaken until the first half of March. They were transported to Albania by the Luftwaffe: 39816 Italian soldiers, 4,700 tons of materials and reported in the 8346 Italian soldiers wounded or frozen.[296]

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Excellent service that was a big help to the Italian Armed Forces and that was much appreciated by the G.S./RA and the Armed Forces High Command Albania. The two groups that operated in Italy had the conventional names "Foggia" and "Brindisi." Each Ju.52 could carry 20 soldiers equipped or 4 tons of goods.

Most consistent of course the result credited to SAS, which between June and December 1940 effected between Italy and Albania missions for 18,990 hours of flight traveling 3,312,088 kilometers. Altogether the logistical effort and made support during the campaign in Greece by the Italian Air Force between the dates of October 15, 1940 and March 31, 1941, they refer to the following information, was as follows:

Material of R.A. transferred via sea	Tons 21,800
Vehicles of R.A. transferred to Albania	n. 708
Various materials (R. Army. -R.A.) airlifted by SAS	Tons 3,016
Various material air dropped (Sqd: Aut. T. Aeralba)	Tons 244
Missions performed by SM.81 and Ca.133 of Aeralba	n. 296
Military staff carried by SM.81 and Ca.133/T. (Aeralba)	n. 2,388
Flight hours performed by Sqd. Aut. T. Aeralba	n. 904
Military Personal carried by NCAL-NAI (SM.75 -Fiat G.18)	n. 4,526
Various materials (R.Army -R.A.) transported by NCAL/NAI	Tons 524
Flight hours performed by NCAL-NAI	n. 2,320
Military personal transported by SAS (5M.73, SM.75, SM.82, SM.81)	n. 30,851
Military personal transported by the Luftwaffe '(K'G. 1st -Ju.52)	n. 39816
Flight hours Luftwaffe	n. 13,312
Wounded transported to Italy by Luftwaffe	n. 8,346
Wounded transported to Italy by SAS	n. 16547
Various material transported to Italy by SAS	Tons 111
Aircraft lost (2 SM.73, 1 SM.81, 1 G.18V, 2 Ba.44)	n. 6
SAS flight hours (10-6-1940 / 30-4-1941)	n. 21,400
Material transported by the Luftwaffe	Tons 4,700

CONCLUSIONS

The conquest of the air domain also allowed Italy the victorious final course of the Greek campaign and contrast that the RAF opposed or tried to oppose Italian air force to hinder the flow of supplies through the convoys from Italy, was blocked, shattered, blunt and void by the Italian air supremacy that prevented among other things the Mediterranean Fleet, access in lower Adriatic if not for the alternatives and isolated actions to explicate confusion in the Strait of Otranto in the night of November 11 in the attack in Taranto, and in the modest, discrete action of submarines.

The commitment and the sacrifices made by the Royal Air Force during the 6 months that lasted the war with Greece, are summarized in the exposition of the following statistical data as a whole including the work done by the 4th Air Force Albania and the Air Force:

ACTIVITY OF WAR AIR - GREECE (28 Oct. 1940/30 April 1941)	
Aircraft bomber, fighter and reconnaissance employed globally	n. 26,056
Acts of war carried out (planned operations)	n. 1,567
Aircraft lost for war causes (Aeralba n. 44 – 4th Air Fleet n. 35)	n. 79
Enemy Aircraft destroyed, shot down in combat and A/A shooting (Aeralba n. 261 - 4A Aerosquadra n. 90)	n. 350 (appox)[297]

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BOMBING

tactical support missions performed	n. 5,560
flight hours	n. 15592
Bombs and clips launched	n. 108,377 for 4,630 Tons
Shots fired machine gun (cal. 7.7 and 12.7)	n. 14,840
missions at sea	n. 88
flight hours at sea	n. 160
Bombs dropped in maritime missions	n. 860 for 88,500 kg.
strategic reconnaissance	n. 371
flight hours for reconnaissance	n. 1,458
convoys escort	n. 48
flight hour for convoys escort	n. 119
Missions suspended due to bad weather (82 days)	n. 1,231
Total airplanes operated; missions	n. 7,777

FIGHTERS

Surveillance cruises performed	n. 5,982
flight hours	n. 9,366
departures on alarm	n. 1,035
hour flight	n. 612
Missions of Tactical support	n. 5,860
flight hours	n. 9,536
strafing missions on the ground	n. 785
flight hours	n. 1,213
Shots fired machine gun (cal. 12.7)	n. 684,000
tactical reconnaissance	n. 207
flight hours	n. 181
convoy escort aero-maritime	n. 115
flight hours	n. 189
Missions suspended due to bad weather (46 days)	n. 77
Total airplanes operated missions	n. 14,029

OBSERVATION AIRCRAFT (Aeralba)

Reconnaissance in photograph view	n. 529
flight hours	n. 633
tactical cooperation missions	n. 47
flight hours	n. 55
strafing missions - ramming	n. 540
clips launched	n. 24,500 for 160,800 kg
Shots fired machine gun (cal. 7.7 and 12.7)	n. 114,000
flight hours	n. 985
Missions suspended due to bad weather (84 days)	n. 90
Airplanes operated missions	n. 4,250

LOSSES SUFFERED

Bombers (aircraft shot down in combat, for A/A fire destroyed the fields)	n. 38
Fighters (aircraft shot down in combat, for A/A, destroyed on the airfields)	n. 37
aerial observation (aircraft shot down in combat, /A fire, airfields)	n. 4
Air-transport-Maritime Reconnaissance-links (aircraft lost due to war incidents and causes)	n. 17[298]

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aircraft damaged by enemy attack	n. 566
Aircraft underwent repairs at SRAM	n. 800 (approximately)
Engines overhauled or repaired at SRAM	n. 4,000 (approx)
average monthly use (October 1940-February 1941)	n. 3,300
average monthly use (March-April 194.1)	n. 4,200

LOSSES OF FLIGHT PERSONNEL

Pilots	n. 66
NCOs pilots	n. 71
NCOs -graduate specialists	n. 186
Total	n. 323

INJURED FLIGHT PERSONNEL

officer Pilots	n. 20
NCOs pilots	n. 16
NCOs -graduate specialists	n. 29
Total	n. 65

LOSSES OF MANEUVER PERSONNEL

Airmen (deceased)	n. 26
Airmen (injured),	n. 39

LOSSES IMPOSED ON THE ENEMY (RAF-EVA)

fighters (losses RAF n. 85 aircraft)	n. 162
Loss of RAF bombers (n. 22 aircraft)	n. 56
unknown type (losses RAF / FAA n. 36 aircraft)	n. 55
Aircraft destroyed on the ground (losses RAF aircraft n. 87)	n. 200 (approximately)
Ships sunk (15,000 GRT approximately)	n. 5

smaller ships (unknown number sailboats, motor boats, ferries, pontoons, motor-sailing, etc.) GRT. 3,500 (approx)

Vehicles (number unknown)	
enemy locations reached during missions	n. 226
flight hours total carried	n. 40,099

AIR FORCE OCCUPY THE IONIAN ISLANDS

After the position will be the end of the war with Greece, the yield Army of Epirus, and the signing of an armistice agreement between Italian, German and Greek, still they remained to occupy the major Greek islands of Corfu, Cephalonia, Santa Maura , Ithaca and Zakynthos manned by strong garrisons.

The uncertain situation, the lack of news and telegraph-telephone radio links, the fact that certain Greek islands were manned by Anglo-Hellenic contingents anything but willing to talk surrender, would suggest that not all Greece Armed Forces had complied with the provisions made for a number of reasons: lack of communication, interdependence of commands, territorial commands or worse particular animosity of solitary commanders against the Axis.

It remained to clarify who it was up the burden and honor employment, considering the presence of mixed Italian and German troops along the coastline of the area fronting Corfu and essentially German units on the Greek territory overlooking St. Maura, Kefalonia, Ithaka Zakynthos between Thessaly and the Peloponnesus.[299]

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Dramatic sequence of one of the Cant. 1007 Bis war mission numbered 210-8 departing from Marilza. It prepares the aircraft for the mission by removing the protective waterproof tarpaulin.

Take-off between the dust raised by the propellers and taxiing. Destination Cyprus - port of Larnaca - Another three-engine squadron photographed from 210-8 to be a war correspondent cameraman.

For Corfu, Stamage thought appropriate to adopt the old employment plan set aside at the beginning of the campaign of Greece and restart the complex mechanism between units of the army and the F.N.S. of Adm. U. Tur.; to the other islands the problem presented real difficulties and it was not easy to solve, even if the belief prevailed that the occupation was an Italian law supported by territorial positions of responsibility and the long war that had committed men, equipment, energy and hopes.

But to solve these problems quickly and efficiently was the Air Force, which relieved the of G.S.G burdens and concerns within a few days. We follow the events chronologically.

On the afternoon of April 27, Gen. Ilari Superaereo informed that a Cant.506 of 35th Stormo BM on a reconnaissance flight on Corfu had sighted hoisted a white flag on the top of the Karusades point lighthouse and another sign of surrender at the Venetian fortress.

Depressed to learn more about the situation, the aircraft had not been the subject of any reaction and from this drew the supposition that the island garrison, composed of 3,000 men with artillery and defensive positions, was willing to surrender.[300]

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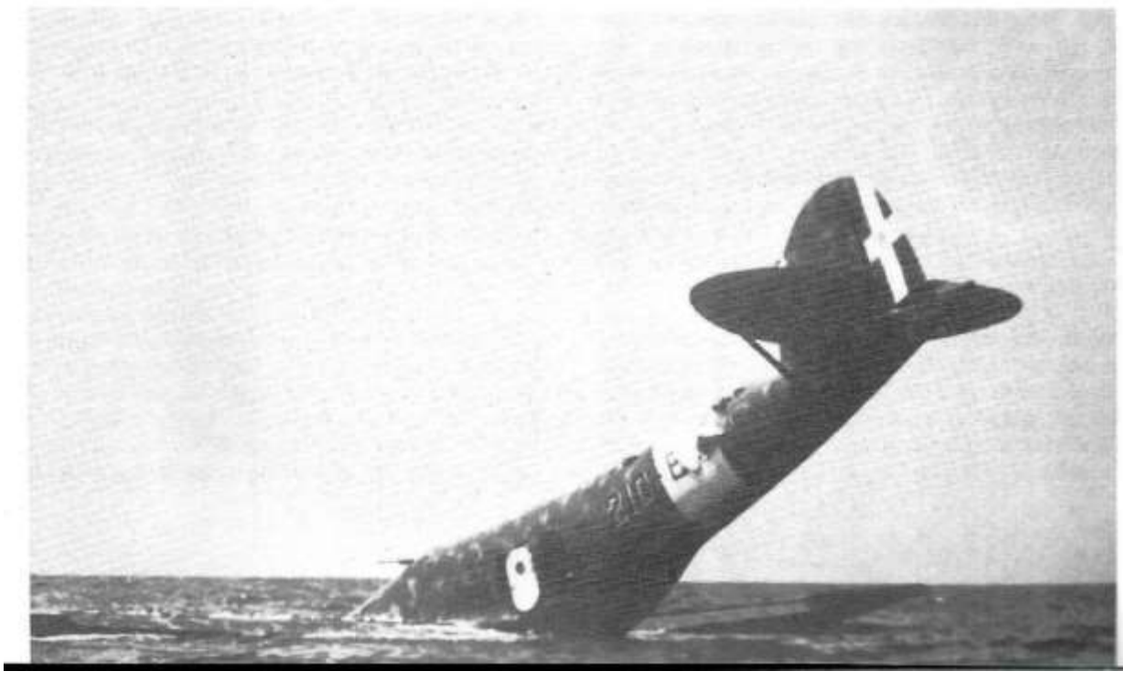
The aircraft hit the A/A fire and no more governable forced to alight. The staff provides to inflate the raft and loading buoy, emergency food, medicine, signal rockets.

The trimolore burdened by its engines and water boarded puts its nose in an upright and slowly begins to sink. The outstanding photographic sequence visually testifies to an episode of Italian war aviation.



Brindisi - Col Grande commander the 35th Stormo BM holds a infer-force meeting selected for the occupation of Curfù. A successful coup carried out bloodlessly.

Superaereo informing him Stamage the novelty and proposed the occupation of the island with units of the R.A.

Gen. Cavallero, debated between the technical time required by Navy (4-5 days) to occupy Corfu and the quickest solution suggested by the Air Force, the task entrusted to it to carry out that operation and called for the execution to soon, possibly within the next 24 hours.

In the night of April 27-28, other phone conversations completed the project of G.S./RA and 4th Air Fleet Command, which designated the commander of the 350th Stormo as responsible operation "Kerkyra".

Col. Enrico Grande wasted no time and imposed a simple plan of landing but set mainly psychological effect, realized with the presence in the air on the island of bombers and fighters, as a deterrent aspect necessary to deter the Greek authorities from every wishful thinking and indecision.

The chosen location to land an airborne contingent was the Bay of Manducchio a short distance from the capital.

Participated in the operation: 26 airmen including Col. Grande and crews of five Cant.506 seaplanes, 10 legionaries of MVSN, 4 officers and non-commissioned officers of the Navy, two officers of the RE interpreters, and two war correspondents: a total of 44 people to cram in the 5 tri-motors.

At 08:30 am on April 28 the Cant. 506 took off from Brindisi focusing on Corfu flying hugging the sea because of weather problems existing in higher altitudes and less than an hour later came to the designated location, where with great surprise was no longer sighted at the lighthouse the flag of surrender.

Ascertained the presence on the island heaven of the formations of bombers who launched leaflets to yield, Col. Grande threw to the ground a message to the Greek authorities with which renewed the notice of surrender and the appearance of the white flag as a sign of acceptance on Corfu fortress.[301]

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Col Grande (center top) on the threshold of the Prefecture of Corfu just after the occupation of the island with a group of officers of the various armed forces arrived later with reinforcements.

In response, the Greeks hoisted a German flag on the flagpole complete with a swastika: a new and unexpected surprise!

Despite discouraging appearances for postponement of the action, and Col. Grande decisively and boldly made a sea landing at Manducchio and by floating slowly wore on the shore where disembark after setting up the defense of the flying boat's crews armed with carbines.

Soon after came a few Greek authorities including the fortress commander, the port master, the adjutant of the commander of the island garrison, civilian officials of the Prefecture.

To all these people Col. Grande renewed the invitation to surrender before giving the order for bombing, considering the hostile attitude of the Greek authorities.

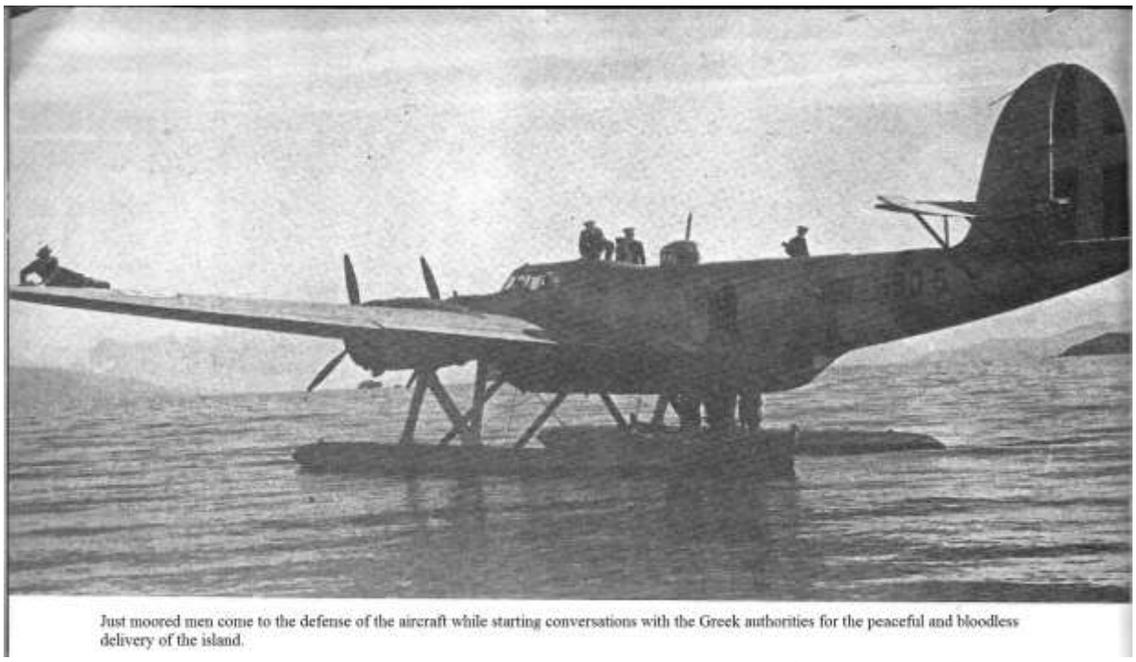
The conversations took on a clearly delaying manner, typically Levantine, as the Greeks stated that they could not make any decision given the absence of a garrison commander in inspection tour of the island. Truncating any delay Col. Grande with a small military detachment he is led towards the village after declaring the Greek prisoners on parole and did hoist the tricolor on the old Venetian fortress.

He foiled an attempt of looting of the warehouses for commodities on the part of civilians and abandoned any attempt to further interview with the military that gave the impression of waiting for an order to decide what to do. Col. Grande then established contact exclusively with civil leaders, more sympathetic to a peaceful solution to the case, and obtained by officials of the Prefecture for the unconditional surrender of the city and the commitment to maintain calm and order among the civilian population.

In the afternoon came reinforcement 4 Cant. 506 with about thirty police officers and airmen from the airport of Brindisi.

Late in the evening it was tracked down in the Metropolitan of Corfu the commander of the garrison, which refused the surrender explicitly of his troops, claiming to have previously agreed by telephone with the German commander of Gianina - Ubersturmfuhrer (1st Lt) SS. Dietrich- of the Leib Standarte "Adolf Hitler" Div., who had accepted and that he would send at his earliest a plenipotentiary for the usual formalities.[302]

302



Just moored men come to the defense of the aircraft while starting conversations with the Greek authorities for the peaceful and bloodless delivery of the island.

That explained, according to the Greek commander, the presence of the German flag on the flagpole of the fortress.

Col. Grande rejected any further prevarication and also demanded the unconditional surrender to the military setting an ultimatum it understood the serious setback that would be affected by the armed forces Italian in front of the Greeks, leaving the Germans the honors of an undeserved result.

Came by radio urged the urgent dispatch of Army units to force the situation and spent the night in an atmosphere of tension and concern.

On the morning of the 29th came from Butrinto with a fishing boat the German official representative -an SS senior officer -who established "de facto" the situation, appeared to Col. Grande, saluted stiffly and returned to the continent. The same morning transported from Vlora with fast ships, came the first Italian soldiers (I-17 Inf. Regt. "Acqui") that Col. Grande preparing to extreme protection of the capital and in the afternoon the where the soldiers now marginalized by events capitulated unconditionally by delivering the weapons of the three Battalions, headquartered in Scriperò, Magulades and Analispis, unarmed quickly after a reaction suggestion in the barracks of Scriperò promptly extinguished by the Italian infantry.

One of the Greek officers who had conducted the negotiations for the surrender of Corfu together with a captain of the 35th Stormo landed on the island with a handful of Italian soldiers.

In the evening arrived in Corfu also the command of the "Acqui" Inf. Div. with the II-17th Regiment and was completed the occupation of the island using captured vehicles.[303]

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A Cant 506 190th Sqd. of the coast of Corfu over flown at low height with protective and support aircraft. After long discussions, the Greek authorities gave all powers to Col. Grande who had made the operation.

On the morning of April 30 seaplanes of 35th Stormo carrying food and medicine to the civilian population, Col. Grande yielded to the Army command responsible for Corfu and on May 10 the small aircraft garrison star of such an excellent result returned to Brindisi to a joyfully welcomed by military of the seaplane base.

The Air Force had done a commendable and intelligent service, carried out with determination, quickness, diplomacy, efficiency.

THE AIRDROP ON KEFALONIA

The occupation of Kefalonia, carried out in partnership between the Army and the Air Force, had the same reasons of prestige and psychological priorities that had advised the occupation of Corfu, although it was realized in different forms and with greater technical difficulties and action.

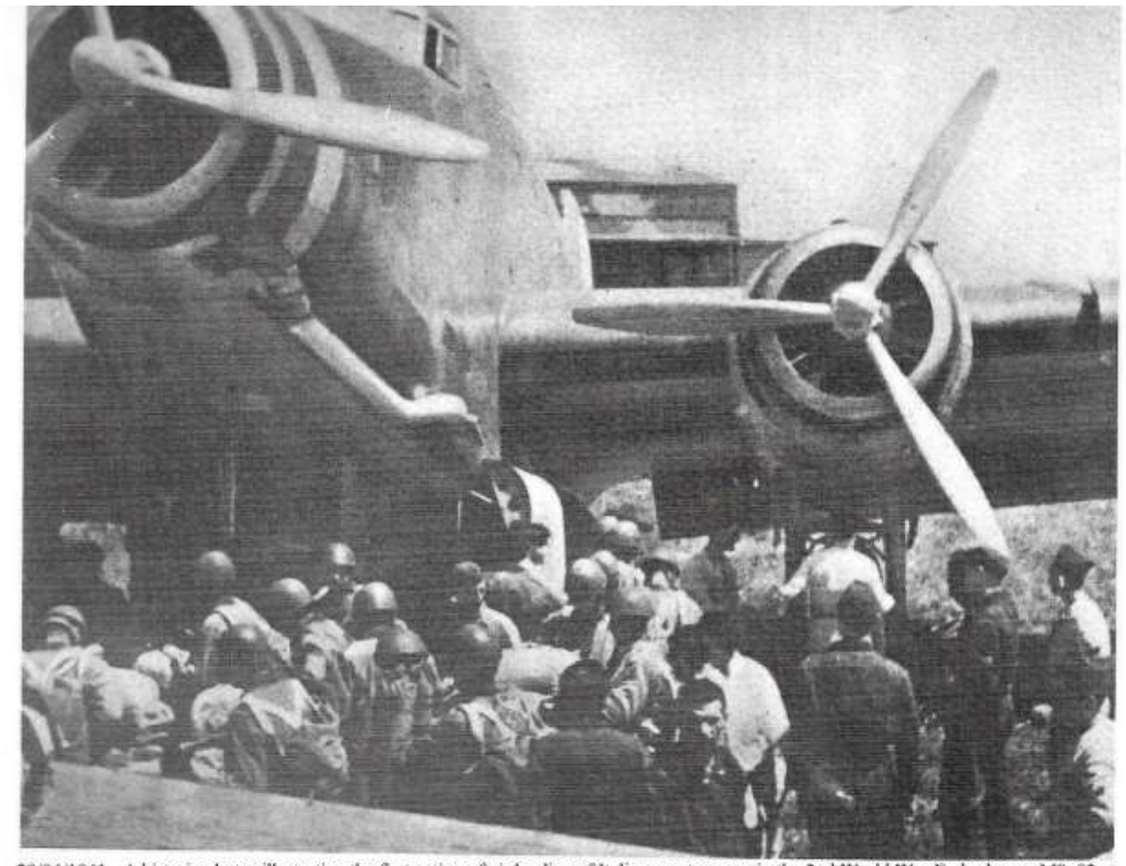
The island was near about 300 km. from the Galatina air base to the Italian south, was located off the coast of Thessaly and the Peloponnesus, the mouth of the Gulf of Patras, and was considered of great military importance for the monitoring of the approach routes to the Strait of Otranto and the Gulf of Taranto.

The presence of German troops in the two mentioned regions, would suggest that these would have no difficulty to occupy the Ionic islands of Zakynthos, Ithaca, Kefalonia S. Maura and if such employment fell within the OKW and in the military-strategic plans and Reich politicians. It was therefore necessary to act quickly and act promptly.

The problem was affected once again the Air Force, who suggested action Airborne assault considered the distance via the intervening sea between Italy and Kefalonia, using a parachutists Battalion among those trained in Tarquinia and considered ready to take action. Col. Baudo was asked as the Commandant Parachute School which ensured the preparation of the air drop of the 2nd Battalion (Maj. M. Zanninovich) while use through G.S.G, gave further assurances on that general employment.

The 2nd Battalion housed in Civitavecchia was alerted and Maj. Gen. Frattini Zanninovich had orders to leave Lecce in the evening of April 28, bringing 5th Co. (Capt. Avogadro) and 6th (Capt. Macchiato) supplied with full of arms, ammunition, equipment, aviation containers.[304]

304



28/04/1941 - A historic photos illustrating the first action of air landing of Italian paratroopers in the 2nd World War Embark on a MS. 82 at the airport of Galatina the 2nd Battalion of paratroopers to occupy Kefalonia.

In the morning, the unit arrived by rail at Lecce from where it was transferred by truck to the Galatina Airport. It followed a report on the operation, in which was revealed the location of launch kept hidden until then, clarified the point of landing in the Krancia area (3 km. From Argostoli), established the method of execution that had certain similarities with that of Corfu with intervention of bomber formations and invitations to surrender by means of leaflets.

Only serious difficulty ascertained: the lack of three-engined SM.82 equipped for paratrooper drops!

Tarquinia was necessary to warn of the difficulties and Col. Baudouin promptly mobilized the flight unit of the school, which were revised and checked throughout the day of the 29th the Ca.133 supplied with admirable dedication, in the morning of the 30th a formation of 12 three-engined Caproni under the command of Capt. Dante Salvetat he appeared compact in Galatina sky among the excitement of paratroopers and airmen present.

But it was not necessary to use the old Ca.133, because in the meantime the 4th Air Fleet Command had managed to find after feverish consultations 3 SM.82 of SAS with the launch equipment and to send them to Galatina with specialized personnel for the Airborne paratrooper assault under the command Capt. RE Oss. G. Vlerando.

The accommodation capacity of 3 SM.82 however, was only 80 parachutists so we were forced to leave, and ground the 6th co., available for an additional airdrop if he felt the need to send reinforcements to Kefalonia.

The responsibility of the operation was entrusted to Maj. Zanninovich and included: Airborne assault, occupation of the capital, disarming of the garrison, contacts with the civil authorities for the surrender, building control, and important local.

Expected time -24 hours -before the arrival via sea of the garrison destined permanently to Kefalonia establish signals for air support: flares, smoke colored, with connections equipment RF.2 air drop radios to signal, TXO radio mod. SIM entrusted to a corporal interpreter of Albanian origin.[305]

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The three aircraft took off from Galatina at 13:00 and shortly after 14:00 were in the sky of Kefalonia, where located the chosen location was given the signal to jump exactly at 14:30 of April 30, 1941 -A historic day for Italian military skydiving!

The Krancia barren and rocky area caused somewhat rough landings and 7 paratroopers are injured, one of them most severely for concussion. No reaction of the Greeks! The SM.82 then throw the containers with the material while the paratroopers block the road to Argostoli some vehicles and move more quickly towards the village where the garrison is captured, occupied the Prefecture, guarded the prison and the warehouses. On the building of the Prefecture is raised the Italian flag!

It was not necessary to launch other paratroopers but only food supplies for the population. In the afternoon we arrive in Argostoli 2 Cant.506 carrying the Lt. Col. Dalle Mole of the Air Force to establish contacts with the paratroopers.

It is decided on joint action to occupy Zakynthos, where a pro-German Prefect asked the intervention of German troops who to deliver the island. 2 fishing boats departed -with thirty paratroopers aboard under the command of Maj. Zanninovich getting the island diplomatically made without difficulty.

It was neutralized to the radio of the British Consul placed under home monitoring, rendered military honors to a RAF pilot shot down two days before in combat, acquitted service tasks. In the following days they were thrown food, flour and medicines for the people of Zakynthos who had sorely needed.

On May 1st, a platoon of paratroopers arrived with a fishing boat from Zante occupied the mythical island of Ithaca thus completing the Ionian archipelago occupation because even Santa Maura was in conflict with, from the Navy units detached by the F.N.S. Command.

The whole operation "Ionian Islands" had ended positively, without any bloodshed, peacefully and with full satisfaction of the G.S.G, the Air Force, the Army G.S.[306]

28/04/1941 - While a Cant. 506 flying boat of Col. Grande approach Corfu, the island was overflown by formations of bombers and fighters to persuade the garrison to surrender. A 1007 of the 107th Group BT in flight over the area.

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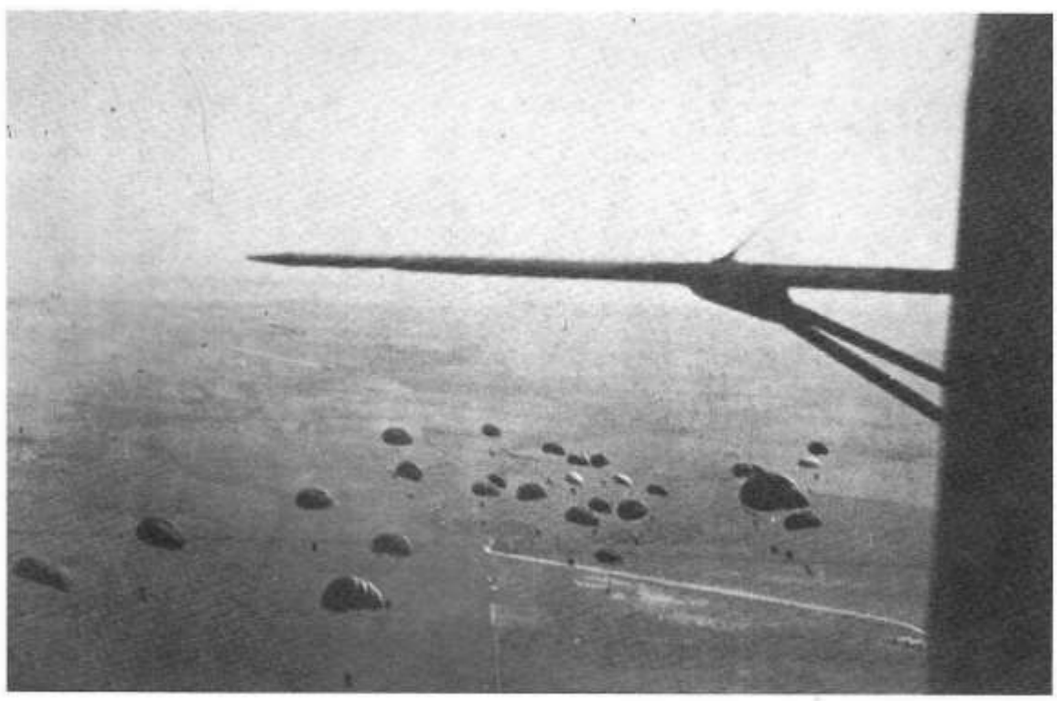
AIRCRAFT USED FOR THE OCCUPATION OF THE IONIAN ISLANDS

Protection cruises	Bombers,	n. 128
	Fighters	n. 49
Air invasion of Corfu	Cant.506	n. 12
Airborne landing on Kefalonia	SM.82	n. 3
Airborne landing of materials	SM.82	n. 6
Air landing of materials	Q.li	n. 94
Airlift of materials	Cant.506	n. 47
airborne materials	Q.li	n. 68

R.A. STAFF EMPLOYED IN THE BALKANS
(Period 10/28/1940 to 5/1/1941)

	Officers	NCOs –Troops
2nd Air Fleet	112	296
4th Air Fleet	550	5,534
4th Z.A.T.	541	9,673
Command Air Force Albanian	679	7,610
Command Sup. Aviation R. E.	243	1,327
Command Sup. Aviation R.M.	220	1,216
Total 28,001	2,345	25,656[307]

Launching paratroopers on Kefalonia (loc. Krancia). A company occupies in a short time Prefecture, barracks & depots, forcing the garrison to lay down arms bloodless.



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Also on Kefalonia like in Corfu, bomber units provide support to paratroopers flying at low height over the area of the capital of Argostoli. Soon the city will be occupied by paratroopers without a fight.

OPERATION "MERKUR"

The conquest of Greece by the Axis did not mean the end of the victorious campaign in the Balkans began and ended in April, but only the most important aspect and preliminary to make up advanced positions, a new strategy in the eastern Mediterranean whose completion strategy could be said to be defined only by the conquest of Crete - important cornerstone placed between the European continent and North Africa - a guard of the eastern Mediterranean and advanced starting platform to strike with aircraft having autonomy greater to 3000 km. Romanian oil fields of Ploesti, from which the Axis, and mainly Germany, received 80 percent of the fuel needed by the Wehrmacht.

An objective that lies within range of the four-motored Short "Sterling" recently serving added to Bomber Command, whose threat, occupying Crete, would have been greatly reduced.

To reduce this hazard the Fuhrer issued on 04/25/1941 Directive n. 28.

The preparations for the occupation of Crete began immediately after the conquest of Greece and were based on a plan prepared by Stabs XI Flieger Korps (Gen. Kurt Student) which provided a mass air landing of the 7th Flieger Division (Div. Parachutists Luftwaffe) reinforced by a regiment of airborne assault gliders and several support battalions.

The plan, conventionally called "Merkur", predicted the conquest of the island's airports to ensure the influx of air transportable unit (5th Div. Mountain) and on board vessels the support units by captured Greek ships and for the cover of which was it was requested and obtained the assistance of the Italian Navy.

The Airborne assault operation was preceded by aerial bombardment with twin-engine Ju.88-He.111 and Stukas and continued later with the support of destroyers and fighter.

The island's garrison consisted of 14,000 Greek soldiers with 4 regiments (2nd, 5th, 6th, 8th) carrying out surveillance also to about 10,000 Italian prisoners detained in Crete fields and had been reinforced by 23,000 ANZAC (Australians New Zealanders Army Corps) troops evacuated from Greece with the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 10th, 19th Brigades reinforced by the 14th British Brigade sent from Egypt, regiments of artillery, armored units, services units. The transfer to Crete of the ANZAC Corps of Gen. Freyberg involved a significant increase in anti-aircraft defense which had as a reinforcement a Searchlight Regiment, the. 2nd and 52nd A.A. Art. Regiment with the 7th and 156th, 304th autonomous batteries with Searchlights Sec. and the 15th Coastal Art. Regiment.

The regiments of divisional artillery were also strengthened with the guns of Italian and French manufacture captured in Egypt and Syria.

A total of 42,000 soldiers Anglo-Hellenic places in defense of "important and strategic outpost of the British Empire", as British Prime Minister Winston Churchill defined Crete that in a speech to the House of Commons in early May, emphasized that: "it would not have the slightest thought to a possible retreat from highly offensive positions of Crete and Tobruk."

The command of the defense of the island was given to Corps of Gen. Freyberg of the while the New Zealander was commissioned to provide for the defense was entrusted to the Mediterranean Fleet supported by Squadrons of FAA and the RAF.[308]

After Celalonia paratroopers on board vessels occupied the islands of Zakynthos and Ithaca. Maj. Zanninovich pays homage to the tomb of an RAF pilot crashed on Zakynthos after a fight with an Italian fighter.

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Sailors of F.N.S. (Adm. Victor Tur) arrive with reinforcements to guard the Jonico islands peacefully occupied by airmen and paratroopers with daring operations.

The air force sent to Greece to support the BEF had suffered heavy losses on the airfields and in combat, and that what was possible raise in command of the RAF/ME without potentially decrease the WDAF engaged in Cyrenaica, was very little compared to the needs that were requested for the defense of Crete.

Were first sent to the transport squadrons 216th and 267th of "Bombay" and "Lodestar" and shortly after two rescue squads - 228th and 23rd - with "Sunderland" and "Walrus" considered necessary for recovery operations at sea. The offensive component was represented by sections of the 37th/38th Sqdns. of bomber with "Wellington", with residue "Gladiator" reinforced by 6 "Hurricane" and ten "Blenhelm" of heterogeneous origin.

For anti-aircraft defense there were 8 heavy guns and 12 light at Suda but in March came a A.A. Artillery Regiment of two coastal batteries that led to 32 heavy guns and 36 Bofors of 40mm, and also 3 mobile batteries (12 pieces) with 24 search lights.

In May they reached other aircraft reinforcements from what remained of the squadrons 33rd, 80th and 112th fighter who went in addition to other aircraft of the RAF and the "Swordfish" of 805th Sqdn. of the FAA.

The command of all air forces of Crete was given to the Commander G. R. Beamish. The remote support in case of attack on Crete. It would be provided by squadrons of medium bombers 37th, 38th, 70th and 148th with "Wellington."[309]

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The "Merkur" plan was approved by Field Marshal Goering and subsequently submitted to the Fuhrer for final approval, to whom it was personally illustrated by the commander of the XI Flieger Korps, General Student; Goering asked and obtained even by Hitler's approval that there would not be any kind of interference from the Army, as judged perfectly suitable for the Luftwaffe capabilities and possibilities of action, to start and to complete for the first time in history, such a large military operation represented by the conquest of an island heavily guarded and of great strategic importance with an assault from the air.

They would participate in the “Merkur” 10,750 paratroopers with 4 Regt. with 13 Battalions; 3 Special paratroopers Battalions; artillery, pioneers, gunners; 6 service units between transmissions, tank destroyers, transport, logistics, health care and specialized units for air assistance, weather, air launched armament, reports.

The air support provided by the 4th Luftwaffe (General Lohr) which, however, competed the total responsibility for the operation, saw the participation of 10 groups with 530 transport Ju.52 and 80 DFS.230 assault gliders assigned to Sturm Regiment. (Regt. of airborne assault); air potential of the VIII Flieger Korps (General W. Richtofen) included a mass of 716 bombers between, Stukas, destroyers, fighters, reconnaissance planes. The “Merkur” plan included in the details: Day X –air drop and airlift of the assault Regiment in the west to occupy the Maleme airport – air landing of 2nd & 3rd Fallschirmjagern Regt. to occupy the middle-east and center-west of the airport of Rethymnon (Rethymno) and the port of Chania in Souda Bay - air landing the 1st Paratroopers Regiment in the east to occupy the airport of Heraklion.

After the conquest of Crete airports would have been airborne a contingent of 6,000 men of the 5th Mountain Div. (Gen. Ringel) with 6 Battalions, while the rest of the unit with another 7,000 soldiers would reach Crete with maritime convoys.

Reinforcements made from artillery, armor, engineers, transport would be equally move by sea. A total of 23,000 men between paratroopers, mountain and support units judged to be more than enough to overcome the resistance of the island's garrison that the information in the possession of the German commands were mistakenly amount to 15,000 men between British and Greek: a grave error of assessment this will involve heavy losses among the paratroopers assigned to the first wave of attack, and extend beyond the expected fight for the conquest of the island.

In the first ten days of May they were assigned to “Merkur” the advanced fields of Mycene, Molay, Argos, Eleusis, Karpathos and Molavai for bomber units at altitude, by dive bombers and fighters and the most backward of Tatoi, Phaleron, Eleusis , Tanagra, Topolia, Dodion, Cadarnachi, Corinth and Megara for transport formations. The maritime convoys were prepared at Piraeus and the Kiparissia harbors, Kalamata, Gythion, Salamis; the Italian Navy put at the disposal of the German command for the south-east 2 DD., 10 torpedo boats, 4 submarines, 6 MAS and auxiliary fleet.

The participation of the Royal Air Force, comes mainly from the units of the Dodecanese, initially provided an indirect contribution for sea surveillance and attacks in the eastern part of the island, where it was also planned a landing of Italian troops in the Sitia area: total there were 51 aircraft intended belonging to each specialty located between the two fields and Rhodes to Karpathos whose airport was among other things made available to a Ju.87 group of Luftwaffe.

The starting date of the “Merkur” was set for early in the day on May 20 while preparing the attack began with a week before the bombings on the island airports to dislodge the RAF on the fortified positions, on military targets. Was noticed, bizarrely, an almost total absence of reaction from antiaircraft English and this finding left the field open to every allegation that was not excluded the possibility of a serious deficiency on the part of English material for air defense, caused by losses in Greece by the BEF and difficulty of replenishing by the British command in the Middle East. Of the 40 existing fighters on the island in early May they had only 7 efficient on the eve of “Merkur”.

In reality, the lack of fire reaction to the Luftwaffe raids was only partly attributable to a lack of anti-aircraft guns since General Freyberg had concentrated the available weapons around the three airfields of Crete, logically believing, on the basis of the information received, that the German attack had the characteristics of an airborne landing and that it would manifest itself on the landing fields of the island. Furthermore, he had given strict orders that the 40 mm Bofors machine guns were to be carefully camouflaged, also prohibiting opening fire on battle and fighter planes but only on transport formations [310]

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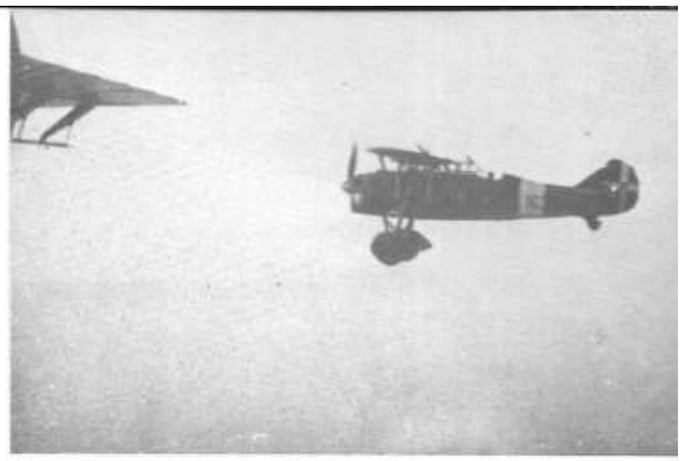
The operational plan established a connection with bombings in the morning in the area Maleme-Chania-Souda followed by air drop the echelon of paratroopers and supplemented by tactical support, then in the afternoon another attack in the area Rethymno-Heraklion and launch of 2nd paratroopers echelon.[311]



In 1941 the Aegean Air Force did not suffer as in the auspices of the aviators of Rhodes, the need to upgrade to better operate in favorable strategic situation of the Dodecanese. A CR. 32 of 163rd Sqd CT in escort flight over the sea.

For the first time in 1941 in the Dodecanese they were to come in the new three-engined SM. 84 assigned to the 41st Group Autonomous BT/AS - Pilots of the department just returned from a mission of war in Maritza (Rhodes).

In view of the operation "Merkur" for the occupation of Crete, the 4th Luftflotte (Gen Lohr) established with the Air / Aegean relationships and service to ensure the support of the paratroopers of the XI-Fl Kps.

Escort and surveillance flights with the CR 42 Sqd 162nd / 163rd were carried out during the battle for the conquest of Crete along with the bombing of areas of the island and garrisoned by the British.

The Aegean Aviation first experimented for CR 42 with wing bombs (later generalized to the assault) by adopting special bomb rack and fuel tanks increased for greater flying range.

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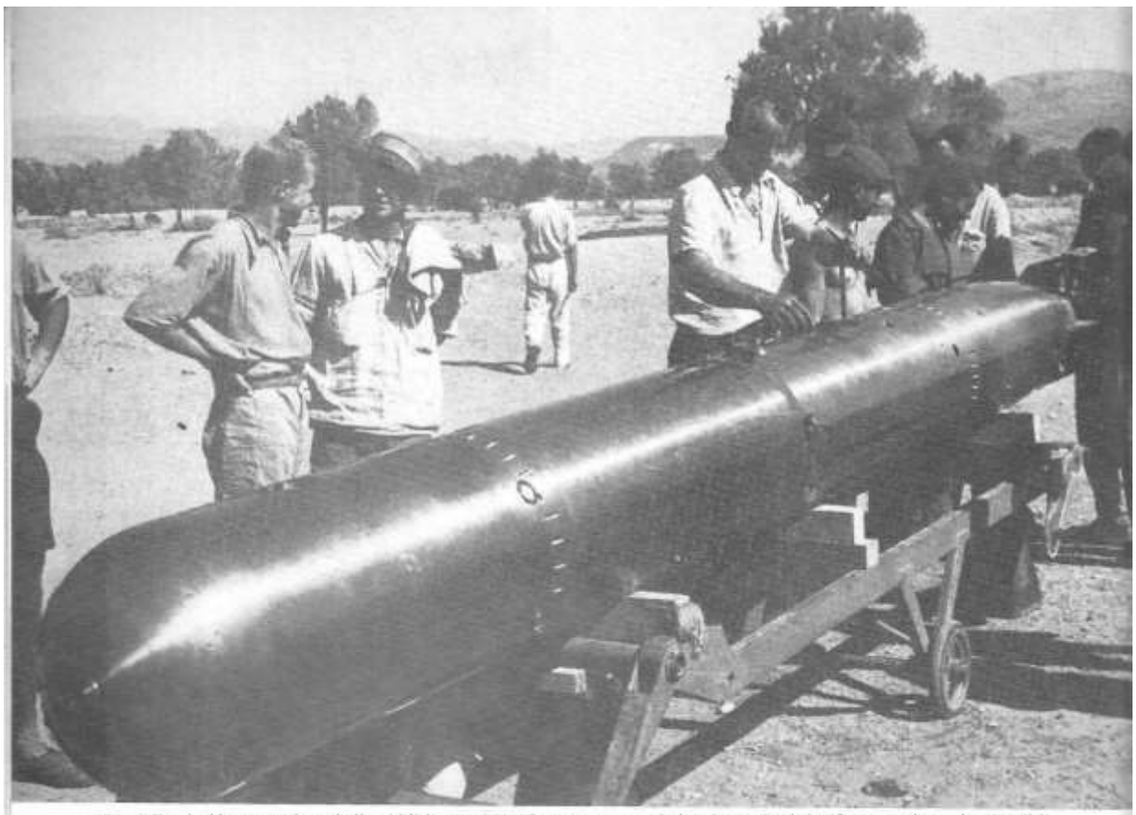

Specialists insiders torpedoes shall establish a W. 170. The Aegean torpedo bombers seized significant results against English ships sailing between Alexandria-Cyprus-Crete and Greece.

It was thought that the morning airdrop in the western and central-western sectors would have brought the English motorized units into the threatened areas and that the afternoon drop would have been facilitated by partially unguarded positions: this was a new error of judgement on the German part since it occurred with a certain delay with respect to the forecasts and only when the British command had a clear and definitive vision of the situation. The insufficient capacity of 530 three-engine Ju.52 available (load capacity equal to 50% of air drop force) had forced the command of the 4th Luftflotte and XI Flieger Korps to split in two waves between morning and afternoon, the bulk of the paratroopers, Whereas, moreover, the technical needed to take off time, fuel landing and refueling calculated between 4-5 hours to more distant airports. Gliders DFS 230 - 80 specimens available - could board only 750 men of the Sturm Regiment and the material in tow: automatic weapons, ammunition, radio stations, food, water, medicines, batteries, various equipment.

Unlike the Ju.52, the gliders, however, could not have a second use of application during "Merkur".

But while the RAF could not field on Crete fields that few aircraft mostly fighters, the Mediterranean Fleet was preparing to provide maximum support to the defenders of the island with 4 Battleships, 1 aircraft carriers, 15 cruisers, 30 DD., 24 submarines and smaller vessels in the certainty that such a deterrent force would not recommended to Germany to undertake any bold initiative: the traditional British sea power defied the new and dreaded Luftwaffe of the Reich![312]

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In the area of Ierapetra meet the soldiers of the 9th Regiment. "Regina" and the mountain hunters of the 5th Div. (Gen, Ringel). During the Merkur died as a result of falling glider Gen. Sussmann and the entire GS of the 7th Fl Div.

In the period before the German air landing the British command had done everything possible to move reinforcements and weapons to Crete organizing more convoys, but the Luftwaffe had sunk 6 between British merchant and tankers, two Greek transport, two minesweepers and three support vessels, the DD "Leon" of the Hellenic Royal Navy. Other ships were damaged more or less severely.

The attack on Crete began at 05:00 of May 20, 1941.

Four hundred combat aircraft and dive bombers escorted by fighters attacked with unspeakable violence stations between Maleme and Chania prolonging their attacks until at 07:30. Fifteen minutes later, long lines of Ju.52 arrived in the area and dropped hundreds of paratroopers and silent gliders swooped down behind the seats held by the New Zealand 5th Inf. Brigade and on important objectives assigned to the Sturm Regiment and the 3rd. Gone was the impression and shock of the heavy bombardment with the surprise of the air drop, the British gunners opened up the tight shot and deadly with their Bofors shooting down numerous transport aircraft and mow down paratroopers. Especially dangerous anti-aircraft position in Akrotiri not detected during the bombing raids.

A serious crisis occurred to alter the program established in the organization of launch to the difficulties of diversion to areas less traveled by and goods formations that one after the other methodically arrived in the area and were subjected to low altitude to the fearful reaction flak. In this worrying aspect it was to add the loss of the entire General Staff of the 7th Fl. Div. including the unit commander Gen. Sussmann, whose glider during towed flight from Greece to Crete was overturned by passing a Bomber at short distance and plummeted out of control on the island of Aegina.[313]

Even the Air Force made a change to the vertex command in Dodecanese assigning Gen. DA Ulysses Longo replacing Gen. DA Umberto Cappa. Military Ceremony at Rhodes the presence of Gen. von Waldau Commander X Fl Kps.

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Tatoi. 20 May 1941- Boarding of the German 7th Fl paratroopers Div. (Gen. Sussmann) departing for the air landing on Crete (Operation Merkur) It was attended by 10,750 paratroopers, 12,000 gebirgejager, 530 Ju 52, 80 gliders DFS 230

At 08:30 it is launched the 2nd wave with the 3rd paratroopers Regiment in the area of Chania, where numerous tri-motors flying at altitudes between 200-400 meters were struck and burned by the fire of the Bofors guns.

About 5,500 men launched in the central and western areas were deployed no less than 22,000 Anglo-Hellenic soldiers belonging to two ANZAC brigades, regiments 3 Greek and 3 British battalions; a disproportion of 4:1 aggravated by the serious initial crisis, the temporary lack of coordination and of orders due to the loss of the divisional Stabs and to the difficulties of communication.[314]

Some protagonists of Merkur January Kurl Student Commander XI Fl. Kps. Col. B Rameke commander Sturm Regiment. Col. B Bauer Commander 3rd Regiment. During an inspection provided for paratroopers in Maleme / Heraklion area.

ANZAC soldiers surrender to the German paratroopers in Crete, The 4th Luftflotte lost island for enemy anti-aircraft fire and destruction on the field of Maleme 151 three-engined Ju 52 of 30% of the transport component used in Merkur.

Sitia Bay. 05/28/1941 - The landing of Italian troops participating in the Merkur. For the first time in modern history, a large island strongly defended and garrisoned was conquered from the sky with air drop of paratroopers and airborne infantry.

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The Paratroopers were forced on the defensive!

At 16:15 it was launched in the area of Rethymnon-Heraklion the last wave of the day made by the 2nd and 1st paratroopers Regiment transported 320 Ju.52 and the operation ended at 18:30 on 20 May.

The lack of surprise, a key element in the airdrop operations, paratroopers forced to settle down in defense to be at significantly higher Australian units with effective and heavy armament.

Encouraged by the successful defense, groups of armed Greek civilians wantonly by the British began the hunt for isolated paratroopers by capturing and killing them brutally.

The Luftwaffe launched essential supplies that were largely lost and thousands of leaflets threatening severe penalties for those who killed German soldiers, in accordance with applicable international war conventions.

At the end of the first day we were not attained the objectives of the "Merkur" to the extent of 25%, a percentage this unsatisfactory and deemed serious and dangerous even if the evening Gen. Student arrived in Crete stressed about the situation had managed to connect with 4 operating areas, to establish agreements and tactical collaborations, which, renew contacts with patient work that the destroyed Divisional General Staff had to carry.[315]

Ju 52 on fire on the airport of Maleme (Crete) beat ANZAC artillery stationed on the hills surrounding the airfield. The Fallschirmjager suffered heavy losses valued at around 40% of the actual participants in the Merkur.

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Load of bombs on a Cant 1007Bis Aviation / Aegean. After replacement of SM, 81 were assigned in the Dodecanese bombers SM 79, SM 84 and Cant l007Bis with better operating characteristics.

Seaplane LATE 298 from the French Naval Aviation parked in Rhodes for refueling before heading for Syria invaded by British troops and de Gaullist units.

The Italian support to the French authorities of Syria was explicated with permission to use airfields in the Dodecanese for technique assistance and supplies. A D 520 of the 1st AC had an accident on landing at Gadurrà

A moving ceremony in Crete. Thousands of Italian soldiers, former prisoners of war of the Greeks are freed from their comrades. In island camps they were held about 10,000 Italian soldiers captured in Albania during the war.

The Aegean Governor General in Gen. Ettore Bastico passes in review on Crete of the soldiers of the Italian contingent after the end of the fighting for the conquest of the Dodecanese Aviation participated in the Merkur with about a hundred airplanes.

Bombing of Nicosia carried out by the 41st BT Group. - After the rotation of the 39th Stormo BT posted in the Aegean the 34th Group in support of the 41st and subsequently the 50th BT with Cant 1007 Bis.

At 05:30 on 21 May was air dropped in the Maleme area also the reserve group of Col. Ramcke of 2,500 paratroopers, pioneers and artillerymen, with the task of conquering the important airport at all costs to allow the influx of reinforcements.

At noon, after fierce fighting, the airfield resulted finally in the hands of German paratroopers while - ANZAC battalions withdrew to the surrounding hills from which it was possible to pound with artillery the airfield of Maleme.

The conquest of Maleme was the long-awaited signal for the strengthening operation with the airlift of the 5th Mountain Div. whose first units arrive at 16:00 on the disputed airport, with a formation of 40 Ju.52 carrying 800 mountaineers and materials in tow.[316]

A recon Cant. 1007Bis the 172nd Sqd RST stationed in the Dodecanese, is preparing to take off for a surveillance mission in the Alexandria area constantly monitored by Aegean aviation.

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As soon as the first Junkers wheels touched Maleme the enemy artillery began firing while the formation of the three-engine taxiing undeterred on the field, download as soon as the men and the material attempting takeoff with dozens of shells exploding, burn, kill and injure humans and machines in an apocalyptic vision of death and destruction.

Of the 40 Ju.52 landed only 12 were able to take the flight for the return trip; others are destroyed, burned or damaged on the surface of the entire airfield that is immediately cleared of the wrecks to make it fit for use.

The heavy losses does not stop the relentless pace of the operation and in the evening 3 Hunter [Jager] Battalions with urgent supplies and ammunition were arrived at Maleme.

On the 23rd another mountain regiment is airborne in Maleme and at dawn on the 24th the situation in Crete slowly but surely began to change in favor of the Germans, who now possessed of forces in the proportion of 1: 2 certainly more acceptable than the initial.

The small German convoy sailing from Greece to Crete was spotted on the 22nd by "Maryland" scouts of the 39th Sqd. and reported in Alexandria.

On the 23rd the Maleme airport and the surrounding areas was bombed by 14th, 45th and 55th Sqdns. of Blenheim and 37th, 38th and 148th of "Wellington" escorted by a few "Hurricane" took off from Heralion. On two occasions fighter squadrons of 73rd, 272nd and 274th based in Egypt, they managed to come and to fight for a short time in the Cretan sky.

Still followed four days of fierce fighting, and on the day of the 28th the tactical situation had now evolved in favor of the XI Flieger Korps while the first naval convoys escorted by Italian units landed reinforcements in Chania, armored vehicles, materials of all kinds. The British had received the 27th a small reinforcement of 1,200 men of the Commandos carried by 4 DD. On the same day Gen. Wavell ordered the evacuation of Crete with Freyberg leading British units on the southeast coast to re-embark in the Sfakia area where they were headed British ships.[317]

Bombing of Larnaca (Cyprus) by the 50th Group BT of Cant 1007 Bis. On the left you can see the airport, on the right the port warehouses, the military warehouses, barracks. (Photo executed on 07/10/1941 by the 211th Sqd.)

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A moving interlude between the vicissitudes of war a baby son of a pilot of the 164th Sqd CT is baptized among the fighters of the 161st Group CT are present the airmen and family, priest and godmother.

The evacuation operation albeit at the cost of heavy losses, was completed on 1st June, with transport to Egypt of 17,000 British soldiers, ANZAC and Greek, but 10,700 British and 5,000 Greek prisoners had been counted by the Germans while 6,500 had died or were injured in the fighting and another 5,000 were missing at sea for sinking of ships.

German losses were also very serious: 3,030 paratroopers missing or dead and 1,632 wounded; 5th Mountain Division suffered 950 dead and missing and about 300 injured.

The flight units had 310 dead and missing, of which 70% belong to transport groups. 151 Ju.52 were lost, 17 between Bf.109/110, 9 Ju.87, between 7 He.111-Ju.88.

RAF losses at Crete were 7 "Wellington", 16 between "Blenheim" and "Maryland", 23 fighters between "Gladiator" and "Hurricane", 4 "Swordfish" of the FAA. A total of 50 aircraft of all types.

LUFTWAFFE AND MEDITERRANEAN FLEET
(outcome of a clash)

The use of the Battle Fleet by Adm. Cunningham for the defense of Crete, had to offer, in the design of Imperial G.S., that amount of guarantees that always the Royal Navy had produced admirably favoring England's political behavior; the same confidence that the Fuhrer felt towards the Wehrmacht to validate with robust and proven efficiency of the line of unscrupulous behavior of the III Reich in European affairs.

If there was in the battle for Crete a serious error of judgment, this was committed by Britain in the presumption that the conquest would necessarily take place by sea, then met, on this road, the massive presence and incontestable of the Mediterranean Fleet.

A different view was instead the O.K.W. as regardless of the actual situation in the eastern Mediterranean, the decisive influence with the Fuhrer of the supreme commander of the Luftwaffe Hermann Goering -Marshal of the Relch - had resulted in the total allocation and responsible for “Merkur” to the Air Force and, strengthened by this prerogative, Goering wanted to take every opportunity that was offered to demonstrate the power, capacity, invincibility of his Luftwaffe in the eyes of the Fuhrer, the OKW, of the whole world.

The comparison therefore, that was thought inevitable, would occur between air and naval power and power while not ignoring the British, the findings in the previous campaign of Norway between the Luftwaffe and the Home Fleet, was felt by the British historically the need for further and conclusive response such as to confirm or cancel traditions, existing theories and doctrines about the rivalry between aircraft and battleship.

We follow the development of events chronologically.

Italians were the first aviators to historically start the series of British sinking in the Battle of Crete. On the morning of 21 May 5 Cant bombers. Z. 1007/bis of the Aegean belonging to 50th Group. BT Aut. - Sqd. 210t to 211th (Maj. Raffaele Orsolan) and mission commanded by Lt. Mario Morassutti, sighted in the case of a British naval formation in the Cannel of Caso attacking hitting accurately the DD "Juno" which exploded rapidly, hit directly by the formation commander's own aircraft.[318]

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A tri-motor SM 84 of the 204th Sqd in its shelter at the airport in Gadurrà.

Then came the Luftwaffe achieved great success. A little later Ju.87 damaged the CL. "Ajax", which nevertheless battered, in the night on the 22nd participated with other ships to the sinking of a convoy of motorized sailing vessels – loaded with mountain troops directed to Crete, escorted by TB. "Lupo," which he did not hesitate to attack the overwhelming English ships with boldness and momentum, binging hit 18 times, so that the commander, Cmdr. Francesco Mimbelli, was decorated with the M.O.v.m. Similar brave conduct was held from TB. "Sagittarius" (Lt. Giuseppe Cigala Fulgosi) that could, in the morning of the 22nd saved almost all the boats entrusted to his protection. Captain Cigala Fulgosi was awarded M.O.v.m.

From May 22 to 1 June, the Luftwaffe damaged the CLs "Najad", "Carlisle", "Perth", the B.B. "Warspite" (put out of action for seven months), then sinking in order DD "Greyhound", the CL "Gloucester" and "Fiji", the DD "Kashmir" and "Kelly" and 5 torpedo boats. They were lost 8 Anglo-Hellenic merchantmen.

On the 26th was severely damaged the CV "Formidable" and DD "Nubian" and then again the B.B. "Barham" the CL. "Dido", "Orion", DD. "Nubian", "Havock", "Kingston", "Ilex", "Napier", "Nizam", "Kelvin", as was lost the CL. "Calcutta" and DD "Hereward" and permanently put out of the CA "York" already badly damaged earlier by assault craft of the Italian Navy in Suda Bay. Another 12 smaller ships were sunk.

The "Mediterranean Fleet" remained with the only the "Queen Elisabeth" unharmed, "the Valiant" (slight damaged), 3 cruisers and 9 DD. The Luftwaffe-Mediterranean Fleet confrontation ended with the loss of three cruisers, six destroyers and damage three battleships, six cruisers, seven DD.

The losses were 1,828 sailors killed and about 200 injured.

Never as in this tragic moment in May 1941 Adm. Cunningham feared the intervention of forces of the Italian Battle Fleet with its four battleships available and 11 cruisers between light and heavy, could actually decide the fate of the British Navy in the central and eastern Mediterranean destroying definitely by Italian-German aviation cooperation, what still remained of the British Mediterranean efficient Fleet a unique opportunity vanished in Supermarina doubts to venture outside the territorial waters, the disastrous battle of Matapan had deeply affected and influenced the decisions, high responsibility, even if there were, as in the battle of Crete, considerable guarantees of support and bases due to the presence of the 4th Luftflotte.

The comparison between the Luftwaffe and the Royal Navy was resolved in favor of the aerial arm to demonstrate tangibly that the marine or terrestrial supremacy had already had their day, and that any military action must take proper singing notice and aviation possibilities as subsequent events in the Pacific, the Mediterranean and on the Eastern front had then largely unproven.

The severe losses of their best parachute troops the Luftwaffe (45% between dead, wounded and missing) convinced Hitler not to ever grant, throughout the course of the war, permissions and blank check in unlimited form for paratroopers as those required by Goering for the operation, "Merkur". These decisions that influenced to a decisive extent when he pointed out the occupation of Malta by air landing.[319]

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On the island of Crete command was given to Gen. Felmy of the Luftwaffe and the OKW decided that the air forces of the X Flieger Korps would be established on the island airfields to monitor and attack the movements of the English Fleet. The air units located in south-eastern Europe would commanded directly by Marshal Goering, even after the establishment of the Southeast German command headed by a General and an Army Officer who was to be based in Thessaloniki.

ITALIAN ASSISTANCE TO "MERKUR"

The participation of Italian troops attack of Crete had been offered to Germany at the very moment in which Mussolini was made aware of the planned operation.

The Italian offer was rejected by Goering for the known reasons of prestige and ambition of the Luftwaffe supreme commander, but was reconsidered - *obtorto collo** - taken by the throat as in the dramatic moment that the paratroopers of the 7th Flieger Div. went through. Pinned in Maleme by enemy artillery, surrounded and isolated between Chania, Rethymnon and Heraklion and serious moral problems, operations and logistics. The German request for an Italian collaboration was even solicited and made urgent by pressing service communications.

The Armed Forces High Command Aegean quickly organized a small contingent of 2,700 infantry men composed of the 9th Inf. Regiment “Regina“, 1 Co. CC.NN. of the 201st Battalion, l Co. L.35 tanks of the 312th Battalion, a CC.RR platoon, 2 Co. sailors. There were 13 L.35 tanks, 2 cars, 1 truck and 200 mules were loaded on 15 small, heterogeneous boats (fishing boats, tugs, reefer, lagoon steam launches) concentrated in Rhodes commanded by Capt. Aldo Cocchia. was to make a crossing of 24 hours at an average speed of 6-8 knots to cover the 120 miles that separated Rhodes from Sitia - the location of the chosen landing in north-eastern Crete - with cover of 2 MAS, the DD "Crispi" the TB "Libra" and "Lince" committed to the protection of the small convoy, for the not unlikely presence of British ships avoided by chance and with predictable consequences.

On May 28, the Italian contingent landed at Sitia at 16:45, occupied the capital and led to forced marches towards the small port of Ierapetra on the opposite side of the island to prevent its use by British troops.

It was a modest but useful operation which helped to ease the pressure on the Germans, and to facilitate in a sense, the idea of evacuation of Crete who already dominated the British command.

It was from a historical perspective the only action of any relief landing made by the Italian Army in the 2nd World War.

The participation of the Regia Marina, in agreement with Supermarina by Admiral Weichold, chief of the Liaison Office in Rome of the Kriegsmarine,he dabbled with the assignment of R.N. "Sirio", "Lupo", "Sagittarius", "Curtatone" , "Aldebaran", "Alcione" submarines "Onice" and "Galatea" and MAS 546, 523, 536, 541, 520 with auxiliary fleet. The air escort would be ensured by the 4th Luftflotte from dawn until sunset.

The brilliant actions already described the Tp. "Lupo" and "Sagittarius", the loss of TB. "Curtatone" to mines (94 sailors who died along with the ship’s captain Cmdr. Serafino Tassara), the narrow escape by the "Sagittarius" mistakenly attacked by Stukas, hundreds of German castaways rescued by Italian ships, offensive missions of MAS surveillance and submarines, the valuable work of sweeping of two minesweepers squadrons assigned to the “Merkur”, the aircraft strafing suffered from "Sella" load of the 5th Mountain Div. soldiers by German aircraft with dead Italians and Germans wounded on board, the heavy escorted German convoys destined to Suda with decisive reinforcements, must be prosecuted, dutifully, in the pages of history related to the conquest of Crete, about the Italian Navy.[320]

Pilots of the 161st Group CT. of the Aegean - The CR 42 represented throughout 1941 for Dodecanese aviation the most modern aircraft available in the specialties after removal of the Ro 44 and CR 32.

*Latin = reluctantly

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The support provided Aegean aviation (General D. A Ulisse Longo) was continuous and in many ways more decisive aspects war ready to the success obtained, even if offered with the modest available forces entirely used in 12-day battle.

Were deployed in the Dodecanese the following units:

92nd Gr. BT Aut. of the 39th Stormo (Sqd. 200th/201st) Lt Col. U. Puccio	Gadurrà with 18 SM.79
50th Gr. BT Aut. (Sqd. 210th/211th) Maj. R. Orsolan	Gadurrà with 14 Cant.1007/Bis
41st Gr. Aut. BT-AS. (Sqd. 204th/205th) Maj. E. Muti	Maritza with 10 SM.84
281st Sqd. Aut. AS (Capt. C. E. Buscaglia)	Gadurrà with 6 SM.79
231st Sqd. Aut. BT	Maritza with 4 Cant.1007/Bis
161st Sqd. Aut. CM	Lero with 4 Ro.44
162nd Sqd. Aut. CT	Karpathos with 9 CR.42
163rd Sqd. Aut. CT	Maritza with 17 CR.32/42
172nd Sqd. RST	Maritza with 2Cant.1007/Bis
185th Sqd. RM	Lero with 6 Cant.501/506
147th Sqd. RM	Lero with 6 Cant.501/506
11th Sec. Rescue	Rhodes with 2 Cant.506/S

A total of 98 assigned airplanes between efficient and inefficient of which 51 were assigned to support operations in Crete.

The agreements established with the German Air Force with both Superaereo directly with General Longo through the Chief of Staff of the Luftwaffe, Gen. Jesckoneck, that those employed with the VIII Flieger Korps commander Gen. W. von Richthofen, included: technical and logistics assistance to three groups of Ju.87 and Bf.l09 be deployed in Karpathos, the aerial protection of the airfields by the 162nd Sqd. CT that would be transferred from Maritza, any escort with German aircraft at time of fledging and landing, surveillance by the Navy of the routes Channel Caso-Alexandria and Port Said and the south of Crete; and even offensive reconnaissance missions with AS/BT on these routes, offensive missions of certain objectives of Crete specifically indicated by the command of the 4th Luftflotte, rescue missions at sea.

They were made available for the fulfillment of the missions provided 24 fighters, 25 bombers, 2 flying boats, while 5 maritime reconnaissance aircraft would carry out a service regardless of strengthened supervision on the stretch of sea normally patrolled.

The missions began since May 20 and soon flocked news on sightings of enemy naval forces in S.E. Crete, comprising several formations with BB, CV, CL. and DD.

On the morning of the 20th groups of the 92nd and 41st bombers attacked military targets in Heraklion and Heraklion airport on which were set on fire some British aircraft. In the afternoon a new incursion of the 50th Group BT on military preparations in the area of Ierapetra while CR.42 of the 162nd Sqd. escorting Ju.87 of St. G.2 (Lt. Col. O. Dinart) machine-gunned after the dive bomber attack on the airfield of Heraklion the decentralized aircraft setting fire to a few. A CR.42 squadron was sent to S.E. Crete to track an aircraft carrier in the area and reported intercept by embarked fighters. The mission was negative because the "Formidable" was sighted by R.S. T. in Alexandria along with two B.B. [321]

Bombardment of Famagusta (Cyprus) by the 50th Group BT - Enemy initiatives in the Dodecanese were constantly refuted and neutralized with the constant support of aviation as happened at Kastellorizo.

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At 19:40 two torpedo bombers of the 281st Sqd. piloted by Maj. V. Cannaviello and Maj. G. Di Luise attacking Force D (Adm. I.G. Glennie) thinking to have hit an 10,000 tons cruiser. A SM.79 was severely damaged by the violent A/A shooting of the enemy ships.

The 21st showed the Italian air force under the best auspices.

Information from the Navy soon became copious and precise four enemies naval groups were sighted in the waters around of Crete; a group of 2 DD escorting a cruiser scattered to Alexandria (it was the "Najad" - Author's Note.). At 11:45 a formation of 5 Cant.1007/Bis of the 50th Group BT sighted in the Strait of Caso Force "D" and the hit in the center the DD "Juno" who exploded with a big eruption. All 5 of the three-engined of Lt. Morassutti were hit by A/A shooting. Later 3 SM.84 of the 41st Group AS/BT tried a new attack on the Force “D” but for the inability to bring in optimal launch site because afflicted by violent A/A fire, had to desist from the attack.

Another unsuccessful attempt in the afternoon by 3 SM.84/AS kept at a distance by a strong barrage. Two other formations SM.79 and SM.84 could not track down the enemy naval formation that in the meantime had also been unsuccessful attacked by Stukas.

In the night on the 21st Force “D” sighted the small convoy escorted by the TB. “Lupo” sinking 10 motor-sailing vessels.

May 22, new sightings occurred but the search conducted by bombers and torpedo planes did not achieve results due to poor visibility. Luckiest German airmen who were acting in the north of Crete, sighted in better weather the naval Forces "A" (Adm. Pridham-Wippel) and "C" (Adm. F.L.S. King) returning after the clash with TB. "Sagittarius", which were heavily attacked by Stukas and bombers at high altitude.

The day of 24 not recorded anything important if not isolated sightings of destroyers. The bomber Groups 92nd, 50th and 41st then carried out 8 attacks on targets in Ierapetra, Heraklion, Makkos, while CR.42 of Sqds. 162nd and 163rd, instructed to strafe positions and troops between Makkos and Kastéllion, could not execute the mission due to poor weather conditions. Although you notice the absence of the RAF, a CR.42 was felled by A/A shooting of ground units.

May 25, new attacks of bombers and fighters strafing ground in the area of Ierapetra.

Two SM.84/AS of the 41st Group piloted by Lieutenants A. Buzzanca and V. Cecconi, a mission on the route Caso-Alexandria in the return after a fruitless search of the sea, diverted by a defect of the compass to Turkey making a landing by accident in neutral territory where the two planes were confiscated and crews interned.

On the morning of 26 a British naval formation consists of 2 B.B., the CV "Formidable" and 7 DD. sortie in the night from Alexandria, launched on Karpathos 4 “Albacore” and 4 “Fulmar” attacking the airfield damaging several German planes. A CR.42 in-flight security attacked two “Fulmar” most likely get away with shooting down one it saw smoke on board.

The British attack had as immediate effect the transfer of the Italian-German units from Karpathos to Rhodes for added security and protection.

In the evening a SM.79 the 279th Sqd. AS took off from Benina under the command of Capt. M. Frongia, he attacked an enemy naval formation south of Crete but unfortunately to no avail. On May 27 - The Aegean Aviation received by the Armed Forces High Command special provisions to protect the navigation of the Italian convoy directed to Sitia, thus provided:

The maritime reconnaissance was intensified at sea inspections; RST monitor and report on the situation in Alexandria, the bombers at high altitude had to hit the targets in the vicinity of the landing area, the fighters perform protective cruises on the convoy, torpedo bombers offensive missions to hold off the enemy ships.

From dawn to dusk 16 bombers and torpedo planes patrolled incessantly 2 routes of approach to the Strait of Caso and in the afternoon were sighted in S.E. enemy ships sailing to the eastern entrance of the Channel.[322]

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Between 17:00 and 20:00 Cant.1007/Bis bombers and SM.84 attacked several times the enemy ships succeeding in hitting the DD "Imperial", which was damaged and forced to stop assisted by DD "Hotspur", continuing a slow sail to Alexandria, where a subsequent failure at the helm and an order arrived from Alexandria, definitively marked the ship's fate who was sunk by torpedoes from the "Hotspur", on the 28th.

To be exact DD "Imperial" was hit by a SM.84 section of the 41st Group commanded by Lt. Ghinazzi, who has the credit of the consequent loss of the enemy ship.

Also on the 27th they took off from Gadurrà 3 SM.79/AS under the command of Maj. De Luise and the Lt. P. Greco and G. Cimicchi, which at 19:00 after waiting for the end of a Stukas attack, launched torpedoes hitting the CL "Ajax" that had a fire on board and ordered to return to Alexandria.

On the 28th the Italian convoy reached Crete and landed a regular contingent prepared in the small port of Sitia. On the night the 29th British ships bombarded without result the landing area in the early hours of the morning the enemy formation (2 CL., and 5 DD) was reported in the south-west of the Strait of Caso where it underwent a first attack the Stukas taking off from Karpathos sinking the DD "Hereward", hurting even the "Decoy" and the CL. "Orion" and then hit another cruiser - the "Dido" - carrying troops evacuated from Sfakia.

Much of Australian and British castaways were saved by Italian MAS and a Cant.506/S. A section of torpedo bombers sent to attack enemy ships could not spot them.

The advance of Italian troops to Ierapetra was supported with protective cruises carried out by the fighter while three-engined Cant.1007 of 50th Gr. Bombed an airfield under construction near Messara short distance from Ierapetra and on whose grounds had been sighted some parked aircraft.

Followed two days of calm and the morning of 31st took place the meeting between German troops of 5th Mountain Div. and infantrymen of the 9th "Regina" Regiment.

By agreements reached between the German High Command and the Italian Dodecanese the territory conquered by the Italian troops from Mirabello Gulf north to the port of Ierapetra to the south (the eastern part of Crete) it was entrusted to Italian control.

The activity carried out by Aegean aviation during the period 20 to 31 May 1941 as follows:

Bombers		*Fighters*	
Maritime exploration	n. 61	Supervisory cruises	n. 51
Reconnaissance of Crete	n. 8	offensive cruises	n. 19
Reconnaissance of Alexandria	n. 4	escort to aerial formations	n. 41
Sighting for naval missions	n. 10	Strafing-bombardment	n. 29
naval bombardements	n. 26	Cruises for troop protection	n. 13
terrestrial bombing	n. 64	Cruises for Convoys	n. 24
torpedo missions	n. 5	reconnaissance missions	n. 14
attempted offensive missions	n. 23	departures on alarm	n. 17
total used aircraft:	n. 201	attempt offensive missions	n. 8
flight hours	n. 664	used aircraft:	total n. 216
bombs launched	62,700 kg.	flight hours	n. 395
torpedoes	n. 5		

Rescue	
aircraft used	n. 12
flight hours	n. 31

Losses inflicted on the enemy
1 aircraft probably shot down
2 DD. sunk ("Juno" and "Imperial")
1 CL. hit ("Ajax")

losses
1 CR. 42
2 SM. 84 interned
1 NCO missing pilot
11 between pilots and specialists interned [323]

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AEGEAN/DODECANESE.

At the beginning of 1941 there was still heavily in the Dodecanese, the atmosphere of isolation, which was already being felt at the beginning of the conflict; It was away accentuated way during the year giving the impression that the possession so decentralized from Italy, had been abandoned to his fate, although the soft connecting wire with the Motherland remained entrusted with its Air Force aircraft and passenger transport, submarines, a few high speed warships.

The deployment of subordinate units by the Air-Aegean, whose command was Gen. B.A.U. Cappa, awaiting repatriation to Italy, on the date of 1 January was as follows:

39th Stormo BT -Col. Cesare Mari (later Lt. Col. Fausto Spedini then Lt. Col. Raffaele Ascenzi). 92nd Group -Lt. Col. Ubaldo Puccio -200th Sqd. (Capt. Evaldo Morero then Capt. Egidio De Rosa) -201st Sqd. (Capt. Bruno Sirchi).

56th Group -Maj. Andrea Festa -222nd Sqd. (Capt. Franco Valenti) -223rd Sqd. (Capt. Ernesto Caprioglio).

34th Group. BT Aut. - (Maj. Victor Cannaviello) with Sqd. 67th (Capt. Giorgio Grossi) -68th (Capt. Guglielmo Di Luise) -163rd Sqd. CT. Aut. (Lt. Pierino Ghiacci) and 161st Sqd. CM. Aut. - (Capt. Mario Riccio then Lt. Mario Rovere).

Were available 24 SM.79, 12 SM.81, 1 SM.82 armed, 14 CR.42, 8 CR.32, 8 Ro.44. For maritime reconnaissance (Lt. Col. Goffredo Di Liberto) they were in the service of Sqd. 147th and 185th in Leros with 14 Cant.501 and Cant.506: a total of 82 between terrestrial aircraft and seaplanes.

Gen. D.A. Ulisse Longo had since replaced Gen. Cappa and Col. Paolo Sbernadori had taken office, the Chief of the G.S. in place of Lt. Col. Luigi Gagliani.

Compared to the situation at 10 June 1940, it was registered in the organic growth of a bomber group needed to increase the offensive capabilities in the eastern Mediterranean, but basically the situation had not affected to an extent noticeable in the presence of a new group, as the envelope of SM.81 in precarious conditions of efficiency and much reduced, was compensated and balanced by the presence of the most efficient SM.79 (the 28 SM.81 of June 1940 were reduced to 11 in January 1941). The situation of the Dodecanese was still being examined by the Supreme Command and Superaereo, in view of the strengthening of units of the R.A. especially as a torpedo bomber, whose use in the Aegean would be particularly congenial result of attacks on ships of the M.F. which they were frequently sighted in the area. In this forecast the GS/RA proposed to Stamage to entrust the command to Aegean Air Force-General level of D.A. [Aerial Division] that is what was happening with the dispatch of Gen. Longo to Rhodes. In January, the RAF made three raids on possession attacking air bases and Rhodes without causing serious damage, losing two planes shot down by respectively A/A artillery and fighters.

Other enemy raids took place in February with Maritza and Gadurrà airports attacks that suffered minor damage, damage to the aircraft and a fuel depot fire.

The first Air-Aegean offensive mission of 1941 took place on February 13th with an attack at the airport of Chania conducted by a mixed formation of the 39th Stormo and the 34th Group BT., which hit ground installations destroying four enemy aircraft. The action was repeated on the 15th in retaliation to a yet another raid of the RAF of Rhodes, after ascertaining that the air base was Rethymo also used by British bombers to carry out actions on the Dodecanese.[324]

Command headquarters of the 161st Sqd CT of the Aegean. The squadron under the command of Capt. Francesco Sforza was formed after return from Iraq. It was subsequently commanded by Lt. Porcù.

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The 17th new raid of the RAF of Rhodes and Leros countered on the 20th by an offensive mission of 39th Stormo BT on an air base in Greece and on the island of Mytilene was being attacked again on the 24th.

The day after a British auxiliary cruiser from Cyprus, landed a contingent of troops on the island of Kastelorizo managing to overpower the garrison and occupy it. The small Castelrosso was the most eccentric of the Dodecanese and was located close to the Turkish coast, did not present a particular strategic interest except in the outpost of Rhodes and of course the moral prestige to the Italian arms.

The 56th Group BT received the commission to monitor the situation and to prevent the influx of new reinforcements and supplies to the island, bombing the positions held by the British with the support of CR.42 of the 163rd Sqd. CT who machine-gunned the enemy troops. The auxiliary cruiser was attacked, damaged and forced to move away although the A/A reaction struck a SM.81 forcing him to ditch near the island; the crew was rescued a few hours later by a flying boat. On the morning of the 27th, Italian troops aboard boats escorted by torpedo boats "Lira" and "Libra" and DD “Crispi”, by the MAS backed by bombers and fighters, landed in Kastellorizo, reoccupied the island and captured the enemy garrison.

Also it occurred an exchange of fire between our torpedo boats and British naval ships attacked with torpedoes and the cannon that they ended up retiring. In March they were bombed ships and equipment at Suda, the port of Mytilene, again Suda the 13th with the 34th Group BT and again on the 19th when our formation was attacked by "Hurricane" one of which collided with a SM.79 and forcing the Italian tri-engine rushing to an emergency landing in Karpathos was destroyed in the collision with the ground. In March it was formed at Maritza the 163rd Sqd. CT. autonomous with 9 CR.32 and assigned to the Armed Forces High Command Dodecanese a unit of the 172nd Sqd. RST with 3 Cant.l007/Bis.

The first torpedo bomber aircraft for the Air-Aegean were delivered in February with crews trained by the 1st Nucleus AS of Gorizia and were destined for the 34th Group BT. for crew training in the transformation program of the entire group in torpedo bombers. The first actions were attempted on February 23 and on the days 7, 20 and March 21, but without obtaining specific results, probably because of the lack of continuous training by crews who had willingly offered for the transition to the new specialty.

On 20 March, however, came to Gadurrà the newly formed 281st Sqd. AS under the command of Capt. Carlo Emanuele Buscaglia - a pioneer of torpedo planes since the 1940s. The squadron had received a complete and perfected standard training course more complete than what they had initially had the pilots of the 34th Group BT. The 20th a mixed formation of SM.79 / Cant.l007 Bis attacked the bay of Suda hitting a DD. and a ship at anchor and undergoing English fighter attack one of which was given to the crews of the bombers shot down. The 21st new bombardment of Mytilene followed on 22nd by an attack on a convoy under way and a strafing the airport of Iraklion by CR.42 that burned a plane damaging others. The attack of March 22 had been carried out by three bombers and two torpedo bombers of the 34th Group that they had sighted a convoy sailing near the island of Kupho.

The shot of the bombers at altitude was not getting results as a torpedo bomber struck a steamer remaining after the initial drop. It was the first positive result obtained by the 34th Group BT/AS.

The 23rd new Iraklion airport attack with another plane burned to the ground by strafing.

The 23rd new attempted torpedoing an oil tanker in the Cape Littinos area with launch of the torpedo coming up empty.

The next day along with the torpedo-bombers of the 34th Group, also attended a SM.79 the 281st (Lt. Giorgio Sacchetti) in an offensive mission against an escorted convoy sighted south of Crete.

The attack did not make any positive success for the strong A/A fire hitting a torpedo bomber. The 25th another strafing of Iraklion with another enemy aircraft destroyed.[325]

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The RAF showed also active with four raids on Rhodes, the Gadurrà airports and Maritza and other Aegean area, which aircraft and equipment were damaged.

In March the Maritime Reconnaissance Aegean was commissioned by concert Supermarina with Super Aegean, carrying out reconnaissance photographs in Suda Bay to ascertain the usual positions by British warships, the results obstructions and harbor defenses, the order to provide the command of the X MAS Flotilla all the elements necessary to make an attack mission with torpedo launches of the MT (touring speedboat) type a fast means of assault with explosive charge to throw at large warships, a squadron of which had long been in Stampalia pending receipt of the operation against the Suda under the Command of Lt. Luigi Faggioni.

The Aegean Air Force was to collaborate in the success of the attack with surveys made to date on the same day appointed for March 25, during which ascertained the presence of a cruiser, 2 DD. and 12 merchant ships (actually the two DD. were the cruisers “Gloucester” and “Calcutta” along with the “York” with the support of a DD., two support ships and four oil tankers).

Squadron of Faggioni Stampalia then left in the late afternoon at the escort of the DD. "Crispi" and "Sella" who ran to the mouth of Souda, where they left the MT between 23:00-24:00 hours at a distance of 10 miles from the target.

At 05:30 on March 26, the explosive launches arrived silently casting distance, attacking ships at anchor and hit the cruiser "York" and tanker "Pericles", which sank in the shallow waters of Suda. The six brave Navy pilots - Lt Luigi Faggioni, 2nd Lt Angelo Cabrini, Ensn. Tullio Bedeschi, Alessio De Vito, Lino Beccati and Sgt. Emilio Barberi were all decorated to M.O.v.m. for the brilliant and daring feat accomplished.

On the day of March 26 the Aegean Air Force long been geared to work in a special naval operation, it was asked to play a special and challenging task support with Naval Forces engaged in a risky offensive mission against enemy shipping in the eastern Mediterranean.

In particular Supermarina required a series of surveys of Alexandria and Suda for the presence and consistency in those ports of the M.F. reconnaissance at sea on routes from Alexandria to Piraeus and on channels of Caso and Kythira, all these surveys which were to be methodically repeated for three consecutive days when it had to be started and ended the offensive mission.

To these must be added some offensive reconnaissance missions on Crete airports where they were based units of the RAF and the FAA with fighter bombers-torpedo bombers and escort missions on Naval Forces when they had reached the waters of Crete in the effective distance from the fighters range based in Rhodes (average distance 350-380 km).

Other reconnaissance missions, bombing and torpedo bombers had to be carried out together with protective cruises on the day fixed for action in areas south and north of Crete.

When these service provisions came to Aegean Air Force, the available efficient planes was reduced to 16 bombers (SM.81/SM.79), 23 fighters (CR.32/CR.42), 5 torpedo bombers (SM .79), 8 reconnaissance (Cant.501/Cant. 506) for a total of 52 aircraft of which at least half of modest operating characteristics and poor technical quality as the SM.81 and CR.32 types now definitely out dated.

This situation was a bit of the consequence of the lack of interest at a higher level over the possession of the Dodecanese, neglect to strengthen this important sector that could make a great contribution to the Italian war effort in the Mediterranean, as later it proved the Luftwaffe extensively with the great results obtained by X CAT.

The reconnaissance of the 26th ascertained presence in Alexandria 3 BB, 2 CV, cruisers, DD etc. (The same day had been sunk in Suda by the assault craft the Heavy Cruiser "York") on the previous day had been shot down enemy planes in Crete (Heraklion Airport).

The 27th were made in Alexandria and other reconnaissance Suda confirmed that the previous situation, but in the night the M.F. sortie from Alexandria and only on the 28th was it possible to ascertain the development and report the possible danger.[326]

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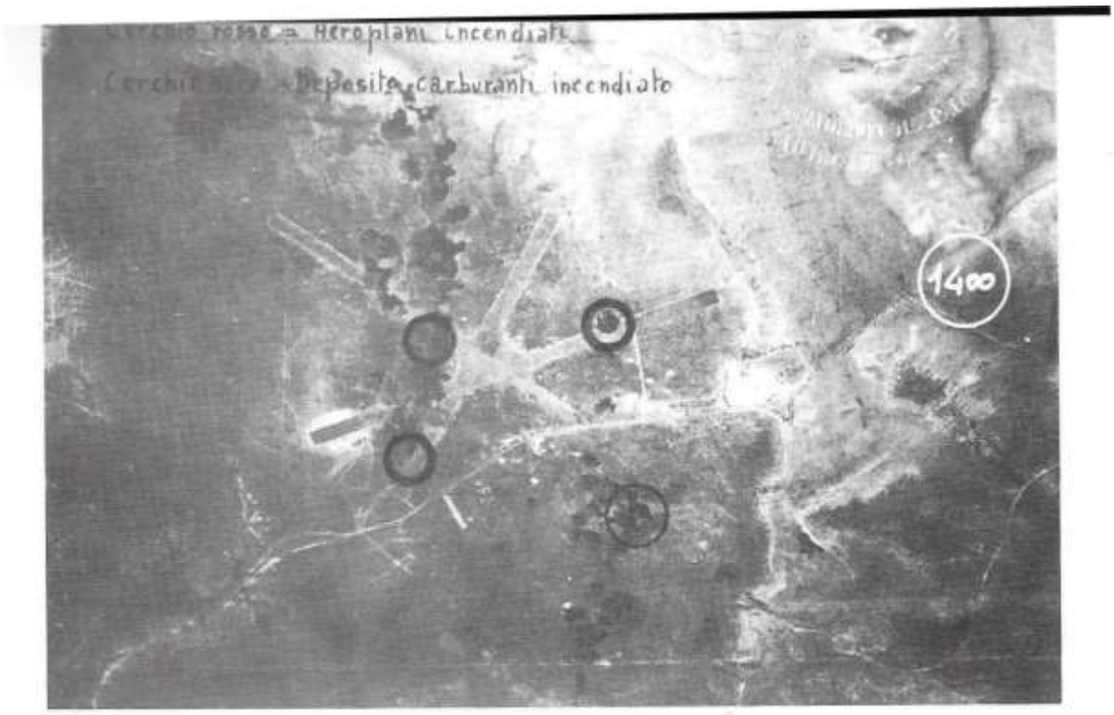

Bombing of Nicosia by the 41th Group BT. - Bombs strike aircraft on runways, fuel depots, infrastructures. The enemy air activity on the Dodecanese during 1941 was very modest.

Military ceremony for the delivery of awards for valor to the Air Force/ Aegean pilots. The Adm. pins samples a silver medal v.m. Lt. Pilot Carlo Faggioni of the 281st Sqd. AS.

As a preventive measure the Aegean Air Force sent 2 torpedo bombers of the 281st Sqd. on a mission offensive under the command of Capt. Buscaglia and Lt. Greco, who sighted at 12:15 south of Crete the enemy squadron that was attacked with torpedoes but to no avail. But the report of the discovery was made late and it caused uncertainty.

The discovery of M.F. had no other particular consequences as reported in the area (Long. 26° 30'/ Lat. 32° 50') were not sent to other air recon-bombers-torpedo bombers-and some torpedo planes took off from the Aegean They carried offensive missions in other areas and on other ships other than those reported by Capt. Buscaglia. The surveys carried out in the morning to the north and south of Crete were negative up to 11:00 hours.

The 160th Sqd. CT. sent several times in the area that had to meet and protect national Naval Forces, the CR.42 taken off between the hours of 06:25 and 10:15 but only one patrol sighted the Italian ships and remained protective for about half an hour before returning at end of autonomy. The bad weather conditions with low and stratified clouds, the modest autonomy CR.42 and the distance from the basics (Karpathos -the nearest base was near the area to be protected about 300 km or 40% of the autonomy of CR.42).

The last patrol of the fighters returned at 13:00 no longer having found the Italian ships sailing to N.W.

The other afternoon missions with torpedo bombers-not produce any result and also the planned bombing of the airport of Iraklion was not executed due to adverse weather conditions.

There was only a torpedo attack by the 34th Group spotted a convoy south of Crete at 17:30, the convoy that was attacked without appreciable results. The MF at that time was much more to N.W. intent to chase the Italian Battle Fleet.

On that fateful eve of Matapan disaster, the Aegean Air Force had done everything possible in relation to the availability of its resources and the possibility that they could express. Had carried out the required surveys of Alexandria and reported the M.F. not in port, it had executed offensive reconnaissance at sea by attacking and signaling the presence of the enemy ships, had made protective cruises in the area where they had to find our Naval Forces until the end of the fighter autonomy. Since that time was no longer able to carry out other tasks or to provide further collaboration.

The Italian ships were entrusted to fate!

In April, the Aegean Air Force intensified its activity mainly with torpedo bombers of the 281st Sqd. while the 34th Gruppo BT Autonomous was completing the transformation into torpedo group, Superaereo reinforced the bomber component by assigning the 50th Group BT Autonomous with 12 Cant.1007 Bis from Brindisi.

On April 2, a formation of five torpedo bombers and 3 bombers took off from Rhodes attacking an enemy convoy en route from Alexandria and Piraeus damaging some steamers and among them the ship “Devis” that received damage to a greater extent.

The torpedo-bombers mixed formations were adopted recently by aviation Aegean and were giving good results.

In early February to coincide with the arrival in Italy of X Flieger Korps, was made agreements between Superaereo, Italuft and Air Force-Aegean whose commander had been replaced in the meantime Gen. D.A. Ulisse Longo, to allow the use of the bases of the Dodecanese to the aircraft of the Luftwaffe.

First units to arrive in Rhodes-Gadurrà was the 2nd squadron of Kg.4 specializing in mine-laying operations, it performed several missions over the Suez Canal and Alexandria.

In March, the German attacks on British ships sailing between Egypt and Greece were intensified with takeoffs and landings by Sicilian airports in Rhodes, although the fuel shortages limited the activities of X CAT in the Dodecanese. As many as 25 for ships of 115,000 GRT. but were sunk by the X CAT, while the CL. "Bonaventure" was sunk by the submarine "Ambra" (Lt. Mario Arillo) in the eastern Mediterranean.

In April with the arrival of the 4th Luftflotte in the Mediterranean the most damage were inflicted in the port of Piraeus in the day of April 7 with the sinking as many as 14 cargo ships, three smaller units, and many harbor boats.

The attack was led by the He.111 of KG.4 and Ju.88 of KG.30.

Other destructive attacks occurred on days 8, 12 and 13 April of the Anglo-Hellenic ships while in the day of the 15th a mixed formation of Italian- German coming from the Aegean struck again effectively the port of Piraeus (9 SM.81 of the 56th Group BT) and sank a steamer.[327]

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Simultaneously with the start of the offensive of the Axis in Greece and the destructive attacks conducted by the Luftwaffe with the powerful 4th Luftflotte arrived in the Balkans to support operation "Marita", even the Aegean Air Force exercised his maximum effort to contribute to the successful outcome of the offensive.

Participated in missions SM.79 bombers of the 39th Stormo, the Cant.1007 Bis of the 50th Group BT., The tri-engined SM.79 and SM.84 of the 34th group AS and the 281st Sqd. AS Autonomous.

On April 21, the 34th group BT/AS incorporated the 279th Sqd. AS - (Capt. Orazio Bernardini and 281st (Capt. C. E. Buscaglia) strengthening the offensive part of the unit always in command of Maj. Cannaviello.

During the month, torpedo planes and bombers had brought to fruition 8 offensive missions sinking the ship “Homefield” 5,300 TSL. and damaging other ships and military ships; also sunk the tanker "British Science” 7138 TSL.; 6 aircraft affected by the A/A fire and a torpedo bomber lost for damages with the crew recovered by a flying boat rescue.

The outstanding crew leaders: Bernardiui, Buscaglia, Frongia, Cimicchi, Sacchetti, Cannaviello, Barbaui, Faggioni, Greco, and Frongia Guza continuously on mission in March and April. In the mission on 24 April in the bay of Suda conducted with aircraft of the VIII Flieger Korps, the Cant.1007 Bis of the 50th Group BT contributed to the damage of many ships, the sinking of a Greek ship (it was the "Kiriaki" - author's note) further damaging the cruiser "York" that the British were trying to refloat to transfer to Alexandria. The attacks of bombers took place on days 20, 23 and 25 on objectives Suda, Iraklion, Milo, in the channel of Caso hitting ships at anchor and navigation, port facilities, aviation equipment and aircraft on the fields, assisted by fighter units, aircraft machine-gunned to ground fire to some while suffering the loss of 2 CR.42 affected by A/A fire.

Also notable was the strafing action carried out by Ro.44 of 161st Sqd. C.M. of Milo in the bay on April 25, with effective results on also affected vessels and boats with 50 kg bombs.

The RAF performed in April a single raid on Rhodes causing some damage and some injuries among the population.

On April 20, the 34th Group BT/AS was dissolved, handed her SM.79 to the 92nd Group BT and the staff was returned to Italy for new employment and training.

At the end of the month even the 56th Group BT was alternated and replaced by the 41st Group of SM.84 (Lt. Col. Ettore Muti then Maj. Paolo Moci) with Sqd. 204th (Capt. Antouio Zanetti then Capt. Enrico Sandaliui) and 205th (Capt. Giorgio Meyer then Capt. Adolfo Rebez).

The occupation of Greece and the end of hostilities in the Hellenic peninsula caused the suspension of offensive missions.

Also it improved the situation of supplies that with the exception of journeys made by MN "Vittor Pisani" and fast alert "Diana", that transported the beginning of 1941 various materials for the RA, were partially solved in the naval blockade periods submarines and aircraft. In May came the MN "Ersilia" with materials for the Army and RA then the steamer "Barletta" with TB. "Arethusa" and "Antares" and the situation improved somewhat, especially for fuel-aviation stocks, the details of parts for aircraft, equipment, weapons, ammunition, torpedoes.

The worst could now be considered passed!

In early May were available in the Aegean 32 SM.79, 13 SM.81, 8 Cant.1007 Bis, 19 CR.42, 9 CR.32, 7 Cant.50l, 6 Cant.506, 7 Ro.44, aircraft which they were strengthened during the month by the 231st Sqd. BT with 6 Cant.1007 Bis.

The increased availability of aircraft after the end of a war with Greece, was directing the offensive potential to fight the sea to be carried out mainly with torpedo bombers and attacks on Cyprus and Haifa to be made with the bombers at high altitude.

May 4, was done a bombing on the airport of Nicosia by the 50th Group BT (Maj. R. Orsolan) and the 15th of the same month an attack on the Nicosia-Famagusta railway as well as a raid request from the 5th Air Fleet Command on Tobruk and carried out with Cant.1007 Bis.

On May 6 attack on a convoy in the Channel of Caso, 3 torpedo bombers of the 281st Sqd. AS. launch of torpedoes under a violent A/A fire and meaningful results found for the damage suffered by aircraft forced to maneuvered. [328]

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The favorable opportunity of the presence in Greece of the Luftwaffe with its powerful fighter and dive squadrons, would have allowed, with a greater and more qualified presence of the Aegean Air Force, to coordinate with the German air force an offensive program directed against enemy bases and mainly against the units of the Mediterranean Fleet. But this favorable opportunity was lost in the modest strategic vision that the Supreme Command had assigned to the Dodecanese in the big picture of the war.

May 9, troops of the “Regina” Inf. Div. supported by aviation units and with the assistance of vessels disembarked and occupied the Greek islands of Samos and Furni whose garrisons had refused the conditions of surrender.

A section of 3 torpedo bombers of the 281st Sqd. AS (Buscaglia- Greco -Faggioni) attacked a convoy escorted sinking transport ship "Rawnsley” of 5000 gross tonnage.

The naval air attack on Karpathos on the eve of Operation “Merkur” was carried out by the Sqd 14th DD of the M.F. backed by the Sqdns. 14th and 55th.

Later when the air landing of German paratroopers had already occurred, other bomber squadrons attacked several times the area of Maleme and Heraklion with "Blenheim" and "Wellington" units: 45th, 55th, 37th, 38th and 148th escorted by fighters of the Sqdns. 73rd, 272nd and 274th sent to protect the ANZAC Corps.

They were lost in the attacks 7 "Wellington", 16 of "Blenheim" and "Maryland", 23 between “Gloster” and “Hurricane”.

On May 10, new air support to units of the "Regina” Inf. Div. that landed in the islands of Andros, Tinos, Termia, Zea, Serfanto, Sira and Mykonos in the Cyclades group.

Navy provided food and transport units to escort the boats with soldiers not met particular resistance from the former enemy garrisons of the Cyclades archipelago. Free fighter missions in the Channel of Caso were carried out by 162nd Sqd. CT to prevent any new surprises from F.A.A. aircraft stationed on Karpathos and Rhodes airports. But now the "Formidable” it was out of action and the RAF had cleared from the first days of the battered Crete airports and the distance of Egyptian airports reduced recently autonomy helpful. The attack on Karpathos by "Fulmar” of "Formidable” was thwarted by an alert section CR.42 the chasing an enemy fighter and machine-gunned them effectively. Because many of the St.G.2 Stukas had been damaged with some CR.42, the German command agree with what Italian Aegean decided to shut down the units on Maritza of Rhodes. A Fairey "Swordfish” (MM. 8403 K) was captured intact that was given charge of the 68th Sqd. of the 34th Group BT.

In the first half of May the X CAT left the Sicilian bases gradually and moved to Greece to join the VIII (Gen. W. von Richthofen) the most powerful G.U.A. of the Luftwaffe in the short time of two weeks of fighting in April alone, had sunk about 300,000 tons of military and merchant shipping.

The Luftwaffe was preparing Operation “Merkur” to occupy Crete and the entire responsibility for the operation of Goering decision had been completely entrusted the German air arm.

Participating the 4th Luftflotte (Gen. Lohr) with Fl.Kps VIII (Richthofen), X (Geisler) and XI (Student) including 750 combat aircraft (He.111, Ju.88, Ju.87, Do.17 , Bf.110, Bf.109), 530 multi-engine Ju.52 from transportation, 80 DFS.230 assault gliders, the 7th Fallschirmjager Div. (paratroopers of Luftwaffe) and 5th Div. Gebirgejager (mountain) Div. with 10,750 and 12,000 paratroopers alpine airborne.

The planes were deployed on the fields of Tatoi, Eleusis, Mycene, Topolja, Dadion, Molayai, Argo, Tanagra, Phaleron, Kadamachi, Corinth, Megara; a group of Stukas was stationed on the airport of Karpathos with a Bf.109 fighter unit.

On 14 May, the VIII Fl.Kps. began to "soften” defenses of Crete with bombers and Stukas smashing everything to the ground and dislodging from the island what still remained of the RAF and the Royal Navy with the sinking of any ship or ship sailing around the island waters or at anchor in ports.

Mussolini offered to Hitler the assistance of Italian troops to contribute to operations for the conquest of Crete, but the Fuhrer under pressure from Goering rejected the offer saying he was certain that German troops would be able to overcome all obstacles and defeat the enemy.[329]

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According to information in the possession of the OKW was considered to about 15,000 men the number of defenders of Crete under the command of Gen. Freyberg and 23,000 between available paratroopers alpine-fighters were considered sufficient to ensure to the OKL the conquest. In fact once again Abwher sinned at fault because of Crete garrison amounted to 42,000 men between ANZAC (Australian-New Zealand) and Greeks - almost twice the force put on the field by the Germans.

In May, the merged 34th Group BT/AS, the 41st Group BT/AS with Sqd. 204/205 returned for refit, while the Sqd. 281st and 279th returned to being autonomous and the latter was transferred first to Sicily and then to N.A.

In anticipation of the "Merkur" the Luftwaffe, the German authorities made contact with the Air Force Command-Aegean to establish operational collaboration and technical agreements and went to Rhodes Gen. Jeschonek Chief of Staff and Gen. Richtofen to confer with Gen. Longo. The support that the Luftwaffe demanded Italian Air Force was summarized as follows:

1) Protection of the airport of Karpathos by the 162nd Sqd. CT. and possible escort of Stukas diver bombers if deemed necessary.

2) Monitoring with offensive reconnaissance of routes Caso-Alexandria and Caso –Port Said and the south of Crete sector, with enemies attack ships and convoys transiting the area.

3) Possible assistance in the bombing of Crete with indications of the objectives designated by the VIII Flieger Korps Command.

For the implementation of these tasks the Air-Aegean would provide a mass of 50 aircraft including fighter-bombers-torpedo- flying boats divided into 14 SM.79, 7 Cant.1007 Bis, 7 SM.84, 20 CR.42, 2 Cant.506/S.

The presence in the eastern Mediterranean of a gigantic air force with a thousand of Axis planes and destructive power manifested by the Luftwaffe during the campaign in Greece, persuaded the Supreme Command that there were all the guarantees required always by the Supermarina for optimal intervention of Naval Battle Forces: aerial domain, information-based exploration and photographic reconnaissance, constant air cover, and in that sense Gen. Cavallero assessed the situation but left the Navy the freedom of decisions with the following directive: "In the event that the English fleet Mediterranean cooperate in the defense of Crete the Italian fleet may intervene in accordance with the possibilities of the moment."[330]

Dodecanese - Gen. Ellore Bastico Aegean commander and Governor of the Italian islands of Dodecanese inspects the possessions after taking possession of the new command.

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It was the most favorable and unique opportunity that was offered to Supermarina to fight at sea against the Mediterranean Fleet, to avenge the Taranto attack, the surprise of Cape Spada, the ambush of Matapan, the previously made renunciations for the presence of the aircraft carrier. On May 17 Supermarina responded to the Supreme Command rejecting the hypothesis with a number of unjustified reasons: relativity disadvantage if in the tactic to the impossibility of achieving surprise, uncertainty about the accuracy of aerial cooperation, the inability to pre-set mode intervention not knowing the plan of the German operations, risk of serious naval losses with prejudice on the future conduct of the maritime war and the maintenance of communications with Libya. It was not taken into account the high seriousness of the risks that he would run the Mediterranean Fleet before reaching ballistic contact with the Italian battle fleet, as in reality manifested itself whenever the major British naval units dared to venture into the sea around in Crete.

"It was basically a denial of the strategy", the absurd misunderstanding and unreasonable not to take advantage of the "opportunity of the moment" as Adm. Bernotti wrote in his book on the war in the Mediterranean. We add a very serious decision, which rejected the unique opportunity of naval warfare in the Mediterranean and that never again will be presented in a way so favorable.

There were still many opportunities to destroy the M.F. since by orders of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the imperial command for the Middle East had guidelines for "defending, Crete at all costs" considered like Tobruk and Malta, as one of the cornerstones of the British strategy in the Mediterranean and as these possibilities took shape at high levels will be documented and reported during the operation of Crete.

The Italian Navy, of course requested to evaluate its contribution in the operation “Merkur”, was offering 2 DD., 10 torpedo boats, 4 submarines, 6 MAS almost all employees of Mariegeo and based in Leros.

On 20 May 1941 the first light of morning, the “Merkur” began with the launch of paratroopers near the airport of Maleme, Iraklion and near the port of Chania, in waves that was prolonged until evening. The support of the Luftwaffe was massive, constant, even decisive in times of crisis as well as the Italian Air Force, much more modestly, helped with the operation that had made available.

On June 2, arrived in Chania Gen. Ettore Bastico military -governor Dodecanese -who met with Gen. Ringel to visit the battle sites and inspect the Italian troops who had helped to facilitate the evacuation operations from the island of Anglo-Hellenic troops.

After the war operations in the Eastern Mediterranean Gen. Ettore Bastico left the command of the Italian possession of Dodecanese replacing Gen. Italo Gariboldi in the office of the Commander Superior Armed Forces N.A. and governor of Libya, and in his place in Rhodes was the Admiral Inigo Campioni.

In a risky photographic reconnaissance mission accomplished in the day of June 24 they died in the line of duty Captain Mario Anelli, Lt. Luigi Gentile and Army Lt. Sante Patussi observer assigned to the 19thSqd. of the of 28th Group (8th Stormo BT) fallen in the Eastern Mediterranean during a enemy fighter attack. Were all decorated with the M.O.V.m. in memory.

THE SPECIAL SQUADRON "IRAQ"

It was mentioned before the revolt broke out in Iraq, organized by Prime Minister Rashid Ali el Gajlani of pro-Italian sentiments and strongly anti-English, who had received the influential support of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem exiled from Palestine where he had fled because hounded by the British for his anti-British activities.

With the forces available Rashid Ali planned to achieve success in Iraq until the moment when he could count on substantial support from Axis, which even aware of what was going to happen, was surprised by the early start of the revolt.[331]

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The Axis intervention, initially limited to Germany alone, as a result of the negotiations between the German diplomacy through the Grand Mufti and thoroughly silenced Italy, it would have been made possible by the collaboration of the Vichy French authorities: in Syria, which would allow the transit of aircraft and German materials for some time waiting to move on the Dodecanese airfields.

May 23 was adopted Directive n. 30/OKW/WF St.Abt.L.(I) specified with the arrangement num. 44772/41, the General Kommand Chefs, which provided as follows:

1) establishment of a military mission (conventional name "Sonder Stab F", to coordinate the intervention of the Reich in Iraq.

2) Technical and operational assistance of the Luftwaffe to RIAF (Royal Iraqi Air Force)

3) Delivery German war materials to Iraq.

The mission was placed under of the orders of Gen. Felmy Luftwaffe/OKL provided the obtaining of the following assumptions: the supply of military assistance weapons, fomenting anti-British riots, organize military forces opposed to England, train them, arm them and use them, establish political militants connections with Iraqi authorities.

The staff of the Sonder F Stab (Felmy) would be considered a volunteer, had to use a concealed identity and use aircraft with Iraqi markings.

Already on May 10 even before the Fuhrer Directive for Iraq, had arrived in Damascus 3 Ju.88 reconnaissance in command of Maj. Axel von Blomberg that the next day they continued to Baghdad after a stop in Mosul.

The revolt of Rashid Ali had broken out for about a month and was initially confronted by the British with what they had available in Iraq in a significant RAF Command (Vice Air Marshall H.G. Smart), a major center of radio communications for the middle east, in a training school of the RAF (Flying school n. 4) deployed on the airport of Habbaniya the command of L.Sqdn.A.B. Savile, and with equipment of old planes between Audax, Gordon, Oxford, Dragon Fly, D.H. Moth, Nortrhop 8/A and as a second line was operational unit can count on the 244th Sqdn. who had in its base at Shaibah an aircraft supplied mixed employing “Gloster”, “Blenheim”, “Hart”, “Vincent”, “Bombay” also used according O.T.U. (Operation Training Unit) by the pilots of the Hablbaniya flight school. Altogether a hundred planes in large part of the old and out dated models.

Modern more the situation of the Royal Iraqi Air Force with about sixty airplanes between SM.79/B, Breda Ba.65, "Gladiator", "Audax" and other scattered on Rashid-Hinaidi fields, Mosul and Baghdad and attacking Habbaniya other locations occupied by the English, while in the meantime the General Wavell was sending additional troops.

On April 17 came airborne from Karachi (Pakistan) a English infantry Regiment reached Shaiban with “Valentia” and “Bombay” planes of 31st Sqdn. and a few days later he landed in Basra the 10th Indian Inf. Div. alongside the RAF reinforcements (18 “Wellington” of the 7th and 37th Sqdn.) sent to Shaibah.

In the days following the RAF attacked in turn the Iraqi-machine-gunned and bombed positions of the Rashid airport in Baghdad opposed by RIAF fighters rejected by "Hurricane" escort.

Other attacks took place on the airfields of Fallujah and Sin el Dhibban with destruction of Iraqi aircraft. A Ba.65 assault aircraft machine-gunned and bombed British marching columns on the Habbaniya road.

On May 5, Gen. Wavell took command of operations on the urging of Prime Minister Churchill and subsequent days also aircraft of the Luftwaffe with false signs of RIAF suffered attacks of the RAF in the airfield of Mosul where they had arranged, attacks made by the 203rd Sqdn. "Blenheim" bombers joint reinforcement to Iraq from Palestine to support the column of the Arab Legion of Glubb Pasha.

The first intervention of the Luftwaffe was recorded on May 12 bombing and strafing of a British column coming from Transjordan who had traveled about 800 kilometers of desert.

With reinforcements received the RAF spent much counterattack to prevent the influx of new German units, destroying, in short time the bulk of Iraqi aviation in Mosul, Erbil airfields while others retaliatory attacks were manifested on the Syrian airports that had allowed transit and supply to Axis aircraft.[332]

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Arriving between 12 and 25 May about forty German planes comprising 7 He.111, 14 Bf.110 and numerous Ju.52 .with weapons and materials that constituted the "Flieger Fuhrer Iraq" under the command of Col. W. Junck and detached from Kg.4, by ZG.76 and TG.2.

The Italian action, albeit belated and inadequate, included a CR .42 fighter squadron provided by the 155th Sqd. (Capt. Francesco Sforza) backed by some logistical SM.81 and mobile-radio sets followed by a dozen of the SAS SM.82 who had to transport arms and ammunition for the Iraqi people according to a program prepared by Stamage and agreed with officials of the Foreign Affairs Ministry.

The action of the Italian Government, while urges as political insight to the implications and consequences that could result from the situation created, was frustrated by the slow pace of military preparations and organizational dysfunctions implemented by the G.S.G, who had lost a lot of time in selecting the type , the amount and modalities of military aid (400 f.m. Breda mod. 30,16 A/A auto cannons Breda mod. 35 to 20/65 with 2.6 million cartridges for small arms and 80,000 rounds of 20mm.) to be transferred to Iraq with only 3 SM.82 made available (one flight per week) with plans to satisfy the supply in 22 trips and 66 flights scheduled time unit (5 months) with a maximum of 150 tons load of weapons and ammunition.

Mussolini's intervention was needed to put an end to the absurd and bring to reality the “Iraq” program organizers, making transport by sea the entire quantity of the supply to Rhodes and from this locality with airlift to Iraq. Attempt, however, was surpassed by the course of events and which reduced to very little quantity of Italian weapons and ammunition provided to the Iraqis.

On May 26, the former 155th Sqd. CT (now called "Special Squadron Iraq” arrived at Mosul to finding an already preconceived intervention German, who with his usual speed, efficiency, skills and organizational capacity, had got their hands on the entire apparatus, the RIAF air force occupying the airports, seizing of fuel depots, installing equipment and communications, control for flight assistance, promptly changing the chemical composition of the Iraqi aviation gasoline different from the syntax of the Luftwaffe, making arriving by air from Germany chemical analysts to proceed to conditioning the fuel with the octane number established.

It was necessary to turn to the Germans to have the necessary fuel for the Italian aircraft while the military situation became increasingly compromised by the English offensive.

The RAF raids in Syria had resulted in a request by the French authorities to the Axis, to strengthen air units located in the protectorate and was authorized the transfer of 114 reinforcement planes (fighter) for the 10 groups located in Syria, reinforcements extended later to another 198 airplanes from the metropolis area had come to Syria via Brindisi-Dodecanese with assistance and logistical support of the Italian air force.

May 28 the CR.42 entered, in combat in the sky of Mosul attacking "Blenheim" bombers intending to attack the airfield. Forcing them to leave without being able to execute the mission. On the same day the "Iraq" squadron with the support of a SM.81 logistics was moving in the field of Kirkuk (70 km. SE of Mosul) to increase the fighters' range and attempting for attack the enemy base of Habbaniya located 270 km. to S.W.

The 29th aerial battle in the sky of Habbaniya with "Gladiator” of 94th Sqdn. two of which they are likely to shot down against the loss of the CR.42 of Lt Valentini who jumped by parachute and was captured.

On the evening was foiled by surveillance a couple of attacks on the Kirkuk airfield and on the 30th another CR.42 was countering an attack on Baghdad by British bombers after strafing enemy columns on the march, and tents. Landing in Kirkuk a CR.42 came off the track yawing due to an obstacle and damaged.

On May 31, Baghdad was occupied by the British and began the disorder in the front of Rashid Ali which caused the abandonment of Kirkuk, where they remained, 3 CR.42 damaged for damage from accidents. In the evening, the remains of the "Iraq" squadron fell back to Syria, stopping at Aleppo on whose airport was destroyed a SM.79, in charge of guiding the fighters to Rhodes providing radio service. It was necessary to wait until June 4 the arrival of another tri-motor to begin the return flight on the same day on the Maritza airfield.[333]

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The continuous attacks of the RAF, whose command had been taken over from the injured General Smart by Air Marshall D'Albiac (former commander of the RAF in Greece), had overcome the modest Iraqi resistance and thwarted the Axis intervention even though the Luftwaffe had managed to inflict considerable losses on the British air force at Habbaniya. Having occupied Falluja, Mushaihida, the Washash canal and Baghdad, there was no other solution for Prime Minister Rashid Ali than to find refuge in Iran while the pro-British Emir Abdul Illah took possession, of the Iraqi government to control the situation.

At the end of the operations the RAF had 34 dead, 64 injured, 28 aircraft destroyed against 23 German planes between, including 5 He.111, everyone of the 14 Bf.110 sent, 4 Ju.52 and 4 CR.42, 2 SM.81, and a Italian air force SM.79.

The remaining 7 CR.42 the " Special Iraq Squadron" flowed into the newly formed 164th that complemented the newly formed organic 161st Gruppo CT Autonomo of the Dodecanese.

The Iraqi adventure had ended with losses of materials and was made with what he had available at the time, by Italian air force with machines of very low performance but undoubtedly piloted with its usual animosity and courage of his men.

As consequences of logistics support by the French to the Axis for the Iraq affair, the unrest that was spreading in Palestine, Iraq and the potential threat of encouraging the Axis to implement new initiatives in the Middle East, had resulted in an order of the British Prime Minister Churchill to the British command in the Middle East to implement the planned Operation "Exporter" (occupation of Syria-Lebanon) that was by Gen. Wavell entrusted to Gen. Wilson for execution relying on two Inf. Div. and smaller units supported by the RAF M.E. with 5 squadrons (80th, 3rd SAAF, 208th, 84th and 815th FAA) with about one hundred of fighters and bombers under the command of Air Commodore L.O. Brown.

The British government in the intent to involve Turkey on the British side, invited the Turkish government to participate in military operations against Syria with its own contingent attacking the eastern borders, but the Turks declined the English offer preferring to remain in status of declared neutrality.

For the first time since the French defeat, drew up in the expeditionary force, prepared a de Gaullist contingent under the command of Gen. Le Gentilhomme, beginning thus in fratricidal clashes as later, during the war, would have occurred in other European nations including Italy.

Syrian forces loyal to the Petain Government and under the command of General Dentz, included 18 Inf. Battalions with 120 guns and 90 armored vehicles backed by 312 aircraft. A total of 45,000 men into verses the approximately 35,000 deployed by the British to realize "Exporter".

After May 14, in which period before the RAF had bombed the airports of Aleppo and Palmyra and performed several surveys, it was initiated an offensive program of larger sizes implemented in conjunction with the suffocation of Iraqi rebellion and abandonment of Iraq by the Axis air forces.

In order of time they were bombed the airports of Damascus, Palmyra, Aleppo, Homs, Rayah, Deir ez Zor, Beirut and the attacks were thwarted by French fighter supported in some occasions even by German fighters.

On June 8, "Exporter" had beginning and clashes occurred in Kaneitra, Sheikh, Meskine, Kissone, Meryayun, Jezzine, on the Litani River and the RAF intensified the attacks and the Luftwaffe intervened severely hitting the DD "Ilex" and "Iris" that supported the operations losing two bombers to A/A fire. Fighting between the French and French occurred in many locations and Gen. Le Gentilhomme went missing in the clashes. Other clashes took place in Kafr Sous, Mezze, Barada and Palmyra, where the garrison of Legionnaires and Saharan resisted for 12 days to the British attacks.

Vichy and Berlin agreed a reinforcing action with a big airlift organized by the Luftwaffe (later canceled for the "Barbarossa" and the unfavorable trend of military operations), were sunk several merchant and French warships, aircraft sent as reinforcements on one side and the other (the RAF transferred another 9 squadrons and bombers) and Syria was close to an iron grip and fire and isolated from the sea to prevent the arrival of reinforcements. On June 28 violent aerial battle over Palmyra between "Hurricane" escorting "Blenheim" and D.520 /MS.406 interceptor with losses on both sides.[334]

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The 29th intervened in the fight also the 127th Sqdn. coming from Palestine to win the fierce French resistance and in the first ten days of July Gen. Dentz asked a truce which the British granted against the advice of Gen. Catroux representative of De Gaulle in Syria. The losses at the time of the cessation of hostilities included 6500 dead French and 4500 British; 27 airplanes of the RAF 179 French counterpart. Asked to opt for the de Gaullist movement advanced by General Catroux among the 37,700 French soldiers in Syria, they were only 5,700 prisoners.

NEW COMMANDS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Once the military operations in Crete 4th Luftflotte had moved to Germany for restoration and renovation of the flight material waiting to be re-used for Operation "Barbarossa". The XI Fl.Kps. was returned to the headquarters city as garrison in northern Germany in order to revitalize the paratroopers Regiments sorely tried in Crete and just as did the transport groups were reorganized for the next usage requirements on the eastern front.

As described in the chapter on the Sicily-Malta, the X Flieger Korps left Italy for Greece deploying on the airports of Crete and Greece, creating an Air Force command to the Southeast based in Athens, a Kriegs Marine operational command - at Salamis with a General Staff in Athens, together with a command of the Army for garrison troops to Crete (22nd Luftlande Div.) then reinforced with "Siena." Inf. Div.

In more important points of Greece were installed Flak batteries, sighting places, squadrons of minesweepers and patrol, naval units made with the Greek naval units captured or recovered and restored in the ports of Greece.

The Ober Kommand der Luftwaffe subdivided agree with the G.S. of the Royal Air Force, the operational competence areas, giving the X CAT the eastern Mediterranean until, at 20° Meridian East with operational jurisdiction over Egypt, Cyrenaica and the Italian Air Force west area of the 20° meridian -West corresponding to Cape Matapan - Derna route. The same demarcation had been assigned to a U. Boote Group which was installed in Greece in the base of Salamis.

The tasks assigned to the X CAT foresaw offensive actions in the relevant area, protection of convoys from Greece to Libya (Benghazi and Derna), reconnaissance in the area designated for the strategic control of the situation in the eastern Mediterranean. The Italian Navy was a command in Athens entrusted to Capt. Galeazzo who had also functions of Chief G.S. at the Department of the Navy Command of the German war in Greece (Adm. Schuster) then replaced by Rear Admiral Forste.

The Naval Group included the TB. "Sirio", "Sagittarius", "Alcione", "Aldebaran", "Curtatone", "Monzambano", "Calatafimi", "Castelfidardo". The MAS 534, 535, 538, 539, three Sqd. deep sea minesweepers with 8 ships and 4 auxiliary boats, two Sqd. the outer supervision –anti-aircraft function.

Minor naval commands were instituted in Corlinto, Patras, Corfu, Preveza, Argostoli, Navarino, Suda.

The tasks of the Navy were many and of great responsibility, because it was necessary to restore the whole organization of technical services and radio of Greece, replace German in the flak protection placed in the defense of the Corinth Canal, place fields mined, check the routes, supervise the installations, the deposits, equipment, protect convoys, perform anti-submarine service.[335]

A Cant. 501 of the 139th Sqd. R.M. stationed at Preveza and engaged in anti-submarine surveillance missions and escorting convoys in Libya on the eastern route. The Air Force for Greece was gradually enhanced to the many tasks it had to perform.

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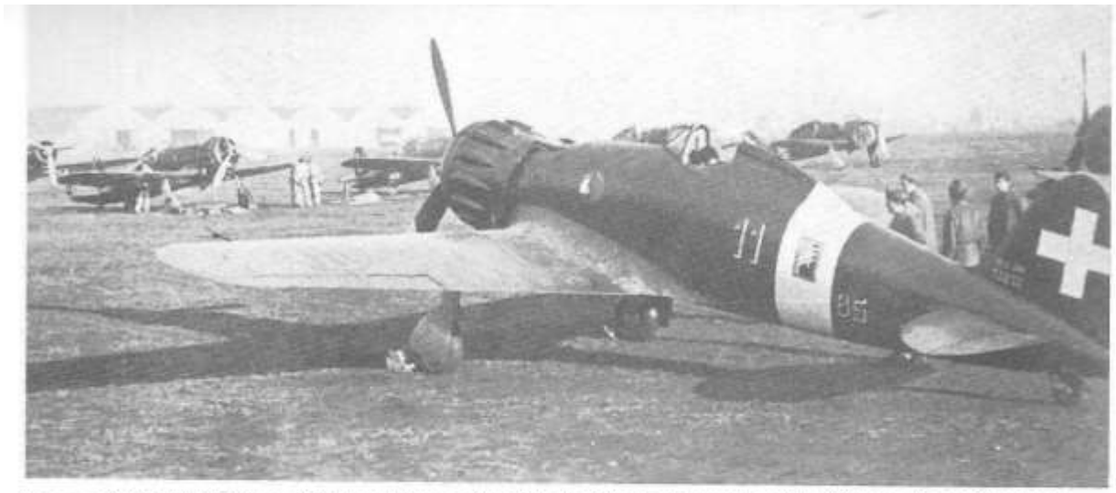

A group of MC 200 18th Group CT. The unit was assigned to the defense of western region of Greece, for antisubmarine surveillance and escort for protection of convoys from Italy and direct in Libya en route to Benghazi / Derna.

The command in the Morea (Marimorea) newly established, first entrusted to the Adm. Vittorio Tur, was ceded in June to Adm. Marenco Moriondo.

Even the air force established a command in Greece whose head was appointed Col. Umberto Chiesa. It came for the 150th Group. CT Auto (Maj. Antonio Vizzotto) with Sqd. 363rd, 364th, 365th based at Ariaxos while Marinavia detached itself a section of the 139th Cant.501 Sqd. RM. Argostoli (Kefalonia) under the command of Capt. Felice Bastianelli. The establishment of the command Air Force/Greece decided on 07/20/1941 by G.S./RA circular D. 2/6225- PM.3200 a Autonomous Area included the restoration or expansion of some airports assigned to the RA flight, prior agreements with the Luftwaffe:

Araxos (track 1200x50 m.)
Messene (track 1200x50 m.)
Argos (expansion)
Megara (track 1200x50 m.)
Agrinion (accommodation)
Larissa
Gianina South
Suda
Paramithia.[336]

A group of pilots of the 18th Group Autonomous CT assigned to the Air Force Command to Greece with MC aircraft. 200 The pilot Col. Umberto Chiesa was appointed the Italian air force commander in Greece in charge of the defense of the Peloponnese and Thessaly.

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The arrangement of these airfields with construction of the tracks, it was necessary for the future growth of air units in southern Greece, whose improvement had been decided between the Supreme Command to the OKW.

The tasks of the command aviation Greece consisted of ensuring the protection of the traffic between Italy, Greece and Dodecanese as to start from July, they resumed enemy attacks on merchant and naval vessels with planes and submarines; magnetic mines were dropped on regular transit routes, the mouth of the ports and there were sinking and torpedoing of ships with loss of life and the cargo being carried them on July 4 falling on a mission aboard a SM.83 was Lieut. Col. Fortunato Federigi commander of 41st Group Aut. BT/AS, whose aircraft had been attacked by many British fighters that burned. For his generous sacrifice led to the death was decorated with the highest award for valor. The command of the unit was entrusted to Lt. Col. Ettori Muti replaced in his absence interim command by Maj. Moci. Moriva as well as Capt. Adolfo Rebez commanding the 205th Sqd. was equally decorated with the M.O.v.m.

With the establishment of the Air Force Command / Greece first entrusted to Gen Tessari and then to Col. Chiesa will assign them the first units including the 18th Group CT., the 31ª/35th Sqd. OA and 139th Sqd. RM based in Preveza.

The need to supply on Crete where airports had installed the X CAT, increased even more the operational difficulties and logistical aspects to ensure the connections and the protection of ships to the island. To this add after the operational competence division between X CAT and the R.A. to serve traffic between Greece and North Africa (ports of Cyrenaica) and the displacement of the new direction of part of the traffic directed to Libya via Sicily, in order to remove even more convoys from the potential danger of Malta who had taken force after the departure of the Luftwaffe from Sicily, greater force, renewed resourcefulness, more effective offensive with ships, aircraft, submarines. The defense of the traffic on the Greece-Crete-Benghazi director entrusted with the supervision of the X CAT, with a roughly 500 miles long route, was slightly higher than the Palermo- Pantelleria- Tripoli route - but offered in return greater security because the second part of crossing (Crete-Cyrenaica) of about 300 miles, could be covered in 12 hours at the day sailing at an average speed of 12 knots and 8 hours of night navigation which significantly reduced the hazard margin ambush submarine (there was only an attack by means of Force K in the area of Malta) but considerably away the danger from Malta which was near the crow flies 600-650 km. on average, and roughly the same number, from Alexandria and by Egyptian airbases normally occupied from tactical aviation units (that the strategic was back on the Channel airbases).

The increased traffic requirements in the eastern Mediterranean created serious problems for the scarcity of ships suitable for the escort, which were assigned almost exclusively to Torpedo Boats and old DDs. The first sinking occurred in July in the Aegean by submarines alone, acted for a review of the situation to adopt new defensive measures and because the Navy obviously could not cope entirely with its own resources to the protection traffic between the low Adriatic-Ionian - Aegean was required Air Force collaboration that was to provide the escort of convoys and isolated ships between Puglia-Thessaly-Ionic islands-Peloponnesus-Cape Gallo this geographical limit, which took over the escort of the X CAT for the western part of the Air Force/Aegean to the east. [337]

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To officially meet this new sector situation on 14 Aug. 1941 was established the Air Force Command/Greece entrusted to Gen. B.A. Arrigo Tessari based in Athens, and it was decided to strengthen the dependent units by assigning more than the 150th Group CT already in the area, the 72nd Group O.A. to be distributed between Larissa and Patras, to ensure the naval and anti-submarine escort with the 31st and 35th Sqd. with Ro.37-Ca.311.

He also tried to verify the identification system for Italian and German ships, to implement standard methods with optical signals and smoke to alert ships to the presence of submarines or surface vessels, merchant ships to equip with radio for communications between aircraft and naval escort, but only on 1942 was possible to equip these devices also on Cargo ships and were already made in the course of 1941 good progress in this field. The Chief of the G.S.G. Gen. Cavallero issued on July 3 provisions to unify and improve the escort service between Navy and Air Force and establish new partnerships.

In July the Axis air force resumed in full the war activities against England after having completed and perfected the command organization and competence in the eastern Mediterranean area, arranged or initiated accommodation and equipped new air bases in Crete and in Greece of great strategic importance, regulated the problem of the escort on convoys in the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean.

The X CAT was dedicated with intensity the methodical attacks of Tobruk, Alexandria and other Egyptian targets, the Aegean Air Force wore its offense on Cyprus, Palestine, Alexandria with the bombers at high altitude and offensive surveillance on the sea with torpedo bombers.

The events that occurred in the structure of the aviation of the Dodecanese in the previous month of June concerned the reunification of the autonomous fighter squadrons 162nd, 163rd, 164th in 161st Group CT Aut. newly established, first entrusted to Maj. Fiacchino and then to Lt. Col. Giovanni Zappetta. The dissolution of the 161st Sqd. CM as a outdated employment concept and flight material no longer meets the purpose, replaced with the 164th of Capt. F. Sforza. The offensive activity was carried on Cyprus airports were bombed three times in July by the bombers of the 50th and 92nd Groups with damage to equipment and fire of airplanes on the ground (airports of Larnaca, Paphos, Famagusta), attacks were also carried out the port of Famagusta and other military targets adjacent to Larnaca, Limassol, Piskopi.

Very effective was the bombing of Haifa in Palestine made on July 10 hit oil facilities and set on fire by the Cant.1007Bis bombers of 50th Group BT.

The air defense was very strong but fortunately no injuries occurred as a crew who had shouldered a flight of over 1500 km. round trip with over 5 hours of actual flight.

More numerous offensive missions of torpedo planes starting with the 4th of July with an attack by the 4 SM.79 of the 281st Sqd. (Buscaglia, Faggioni, Cimicchi and Mazzirlli) against an auxiliary cruiser at anchor in Famagusta which was missed by difficulty aiming and violent A/A fire which damaged all aircraft causing injuries among the crews.[338]

Takeoff of a 1007 Cant Bis of the 260th Sqd. (106th BT Group). Particularly important were the Aeronautical Aegean raids on large gasoline refineries in Haifa (Palestine) which were heavily damaged.

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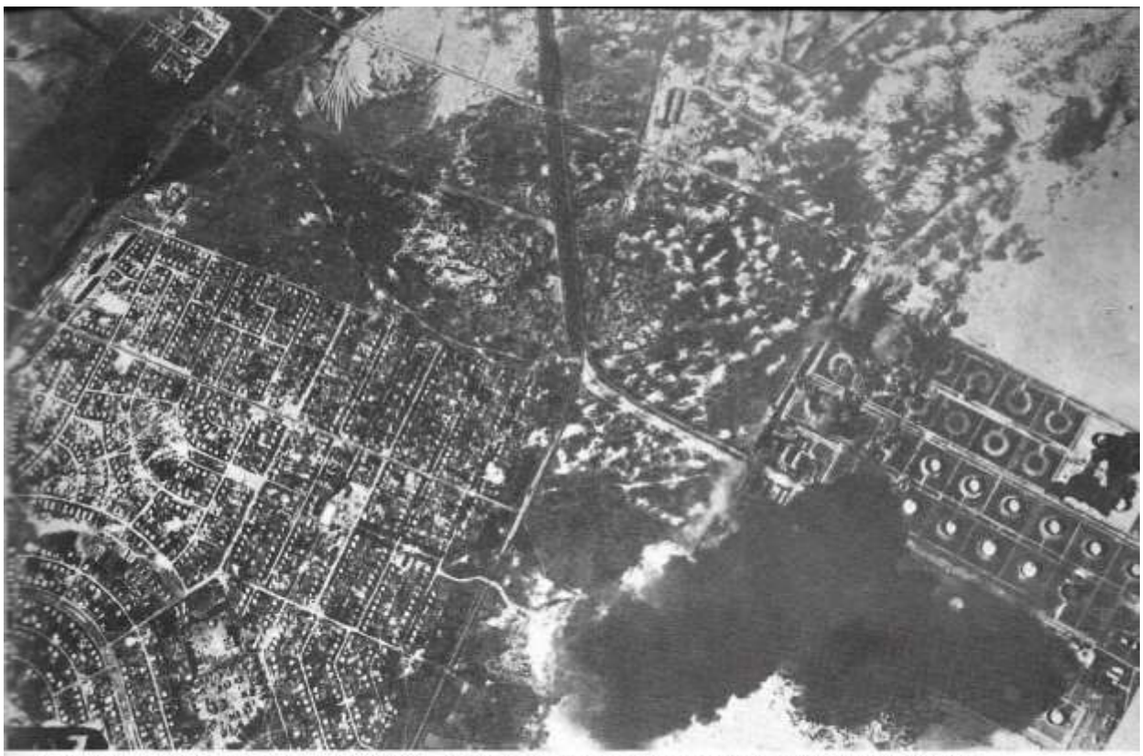

The large fuel depots of the Shell refineries in Haifa on fire after being bombarded by the Italian aircraft of the 34th Group BT. The Dodecanese Aviation was limited in its action by the insufficient capacity of its offensive units.

The 9 other mission around Cyprus with torpedo bombers of Buscaglia and Faggioni hitting a steamer which were target of a hellish ship fire which damaged the two aircraft slightly injuring Lt. Faggioni. On July 19 torpedoing of mission in the waters of Marsa Matruk with the couple Buscaglia-Faggioni who pounced on a cruiser but were both hit with serious damage to the aircraft by an attack by among other things a "Hurricane."

The mission completed after 6 hours of flight and aircraft battered happily concluded the evening with the return to Gadurrà.

The offensive activities of the RAF on the Dodecanese had progressively decreasing between May and July and 3 incursions in May and 6 in June, had been reduced to only one occurred in July against the 8 Italian made on Cyprus the same month by the RA., which must be added that of Haifa also made in July.

In August there was a revival of the RAF Egypt attacked 2 times during the month the Malerne airports and Iraklion in Crete destroying nine German planes with damage to others while in the Dodecanese occurred one raid on Rhodes with little damage.

The more intense the bombers and torpedo planes Aegean activities that attacked 5 times targets of the island of Cyprus; airports and ports in Famagusta, Larnaca, Limassol and other important objectives achieved by the bombers of the 50th Group and by the 92nd who made its final mission on August 21, before returning home. It was replaced by the 47th Stormo BT (Col. Mario Scotti) with the 106th Group (Maj. Julius Elviri -then Maj. Alessandro Bavassano) and Sqd. 260th (Capt. Pierluigi Brogia) and 261st (Capt. Aldo Moggi - then Capt. Athos Masters) and by 107th (Maj. Renato Roveda) Sqd. 262nd (Capt. Salvatore Balletta) and 263rd (Capt. Bernardo Quattrociocchi) with a force of 28 Cant.1007 Bis that joined together with the bombers of the 50th Group BT, the bombing component of the Dodecanese share that the same flight material, but also assigned to the 172nd Sqd. RST. [339]

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Another gold medal to the staff of the 41st Group. BT/AS Aut. was assigned to the memory of Lt. Gioia Giuliano of the 205th Sqd. who on 27 August during an offensive reconnaissance mission suffered a enemy fighter attack that eventually succeeded to overpower the crew of the three-engine SM.84 and to shoot it down.

The 41st Group BT/AS now ordered with 3 squadrons 204th, 205th and 282nd of SM.84 torpedo bombers (Capt. Marino Marini), had mixed use, and the only 281st Sqd. torpedo aircraft was in service with self-definition and tri-motor SM.79. Unchanged headcount of 161st Group CT Aut. who had set up two night fighter sections at Gadurrà and Lero (Xero airport, area) with 6 CR.42. It had increased the number of Cant. 506 assigned to the 11th Relief Section who had now seaplanes in Leros and Rhodes incorporated in the 147th Sqd. RM.

The problem of the attacks suffered by Italian flying boats equipped with international markings of the Red Cross by British aircraft, had been informed by the Italian diplomatic authorities at the organization's headquarters in Geneva for the appropriate measures to be taken internationally and notify them so also to England. The latter made it known, through the British delegation in Switzerland, the aircraft of the RAF used for the rescue were provided with official armament and therefore being unmarked of the Red Cross, should not be considered protected by the international norm and as it was thought unlike Italy, which used unarmed aircraft to carry out this humanitarian task. The controversy does not landed in any agreement until the end of the conflict, as did not obtain any result the claim made by Italy on numerous cases of strafing by British pilots against airmen-pilots and specialists who relied on the parachute after the abandoned aircraft struck in combat or shot down by anti-aircraft fire.

This act of war manifested against unarmed men although legally considered enemies, it found constant application throughout by the RAF war except for a few honorable exceptions, to confirm once again the diversity of assessment of standards and legal aspects under the profile of civility and humanitarian attitude on the part of the individual protagonists. However was consistently rejected by the Italian aviators even in cases of the most chilling behavior individual coolly made by RAF pilots.

The X Fl.Kps. always kept the attacks of Alexandria, Port Said, Haifa, the Suez Canal where were thrown mines that caused the sinking and damage. They were also carried out raids in the Red Sea using four-engine FW.200 one of which fell in the vicinity of Kefalonia and the survivors were rescued by Italian ships.

The first torpedo mission in August came the 6th with an attack on an enemy convoy in front of Marsa Matruk (crews Buscaglia, Graziani, Forzinetti) that did not get particular results.

New mission on the 11th with the sinking of the ship "Protector" torpedoed by Lt. Graziani near Alexandria. Again on the 20th the torpedoing of a tanker by Graziani and Forzinetti and the next day attack on 3 DD by the trio Buscaglia, Graziani, Forzinetti of the 281st Sqd. AS, But without appreciable results.

In September began the offensive activities, day and night by the 47th Stormo BT with attacks in Cyprus: Famagusta, Larnaca, Limassol, Nicosia and the oilmen plants in Haifa while the 41st Group BT/AS whose command was again taken over by Lt. Col. Ettore Muti, attacked and damaged by bombs a merchant ship found in the waters around Cyprus and two other small ships at sea. The RAF attacked Lero causing damage but losing a plane hit the A/A fire.

In the month of October there was no enemy activity in the Dodecanese, bombers of the 47th Stormo BT attacked in the daytime and nighttime missions of Cyprus objectives: Famagusta, Larnaca, Paphos with 5 raids conducted with the Cant.1007 a night mission on direct Haifa of installations and oil refineries with major damage and fires.

Considerable activity of torpedo planes with an attack took place on the 13th by 3 SM.79 (Graziani, Cimicchi, Faggioni) to the M.F. ships including the B.B. "Queen Elizabeth" and "Barham" stuck at very low height by Lt. Graziani. [340]

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The strong anti-aircraft fire and the presence of fighters damaged three aircraft that fortunately managed to reach Gadurrà where the tri-motor landing at the Graziani landing gear retracted for damage. The first M.O.v.m. living in the Torpedo Bomber specialties was granted October 18, 1941 to Lt. Giulio Cesare Graziani of the famous 281st Sqd. Autonomous AS, who had brought to fruition a number of offensive missions against the enemy ships in the eastern Mediterranean, he was seriously injured by fighter attacks that killed and wounded members of his crew. On October 24 offensive mission by 2 SM.84 of the 282nd (Marini and Mayer) provisionally located in Sicily, which torpedoed a steamer, damaging it but had to abort the action for fighter attack "Hurricane" kept at bay with the shooting of weapons on board. Other offensive missions did not led to sightings.

In late October the X CAT had scored in 5 months of activity in the eastern Mediterranean 390 offensive missions in Egypt (Alexandria, Port Said, Suez Canal, etc.) and numerous naval escort missions in the Aegean, Ionian and Crete-Cyrenaica route .

In the same month the 18th Group Aut. C.T. (Lt. Col. Ferruccio Vosilla) who had returned from N.A. for reconstitution and transition to MC.200 on the airport of Caselle, received the order to move to Greece after a service loop for the defense of Rome and La Spezia done previously.

In early November, the 18th Group CT that was deployed with two squadrons in Ciampino South (83rd and 85th) in Sarzana and a mixed allocation of MC.200 and CR.42, gradually began to move on the field of Araxos with air defense task the south-central region of Greece (Thessaly -Peloponnesus), the coastal surveillance escorting convoys from Italy and heading for the Aegean and northern Africa. The permanence of the 18th Group in Greece, in Superaereo intentions who had urged the movement, also had to be momentary and occasional transfer of the unit that still had a squadron in Ciampino.

The organization of the Air/Aegean were reduced in September with the repatriation of 50th Group Aut. BT. who ceded its residue Cant. 1007 Bis to the 47th Stormo BT. and transfer to Sicily the 282nd Sqd. AS of the 41st Group BT., the 172nd Sqd. RST also had been repatriated after its dissolution. The bombing of the actions implemented in November were limited to an attack against a ship made by the 41st Group BT and a night raid on the railway Marsa Matruk-Alexandria made by 47th Stormo BT, to help in some way to the violent battle going on within Marmarica by the "Crusader" offensive began by the 8th British Army.

The missions of the torpedo bombers in November took place the 23rd with an attack of Buscaglia and Rovelli the 281st to a steamer of 7000 tons. (It was the “Glenearn") spotted in front of Marsa Matruk escorted by a DD and the outcome of which was not established for the stronger A/A defense which struck in as many places the few planes made target after a furious chase by "Hurricane" took off from an Egyptian field, hampered by deftly maneuvered by gunners of the tri-motor’s machine guns.

On November 25 in the same waters, the B.B. “Barham” which was saved from the attack in October of Lt. Graziani, was torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine *U.331* (Lt. Tiesenhausen) luckier than the attacks that were carried out against the same battleship in October, by the brave pilots of 281st Sqd. AS.

On the 29th another unfortunate attack on enemy naval ships by torpedo bombers of Bruscaglia and Cipelletti and failure to achieve the successful for error of launch. The most important change was recorded in November, the establishment of the OBS, the arrival of the 2nd Luftflotte in the Mediterranean with II Flieger Korps incorporating the X CAT and Flieger Fuhrer Afrika thus completing the staff of the GUA, under the command of Field Marshal Albert Kesselring.

A new air force with about a thousand aircraft of all types in the Mediterranean was available again to repeat, where he was presented with the opportunity, the successes reported in the months of April-May.

The X Flieger Korps had other units to complete his organic and occurred some changes in the command with the advent of Gen. von Waldau instead of Gen. Geisler, the establishment of a liaison office with the Aegean Air Fiorce entrusted to Maj. Rossbacher and the assignment of new operational guidelines to X CAT.[341]

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Also in December, the activities of the bombers of the Aegean was very small and was limited to two missions of railway facilities between Marsa Matruk and Abu Feidan on which terminals came the supplies for the 8th Army. The torpedo bombers of Sicily and of Libya (Sqd. 279th, 282nd and 284th of the new Capt. Franclo Prati) attacking and damaging the DD "Jackal", a naval auxiliary unit and a ship at sea in Libyan waters.

The pilots of the 281st received orders to move to Libya to the airfield of Ain el Gazala to perform better against the British in the attack and trying to come out at any cost Tobruk. An section is moved to N.A. (Buscaglia-Faggioni-Forzinetti) with another Cimicchi-Ravelli-Cipelletti remained in Gadurrà that it had only 5 torpedoes.

On December 17, the 281st Sqd. N.A. started with the two sections – Aegean - Libya - for joint action against the M.F. at sea, which was attacked with great determination.

Lt. Aldo Forzinetti boldly attacked at low altitude aiming on an oil tanker, but was shot down in flames and disappeared with all hands. He was decorated with the M.O.v.m. in memory for his conscious sacrifice a cruiser was allegedly struck in the incipient darkness that had very limited visibility and launch torpedoes. All aircraft were affected by the A/A fire.

On December 28 the 281st Sqd. N.A. fulfills her last mission of the month and the year 1941 with an attack carried out by 4 SM.79 (Buscaglia-Cimicchi-Cipelletti-Rovelli) against a convoy escorted by DDs in front of Tobruk.

The attack brought with extreme decision obtained as results in damage to a cruiser and a big merchant exploding. Was shot down by a fighter Grumman “Martlet” of the 805th Sqd. FAA and plunged into the sea in flames, the tri-motor of Lt. Luigi Rovelli in whose memory was decreed the assignment of the maximum award for valor.

For heavy losses the torpedo bombers 281st and 282nd Sqd. were then dissolved, the 41st Group Aut. BT/AS yielded its S.M.84 which replaced with more efficient and reliable S.M.79 in part obtained from the dissolved Aegean torpedo bomber squadrons.

In October, was dissolved the 39th Stormo BT. and a little later the 92nd Group. The activities of the RAF had occurred and addressed mainly on the ports of Greece Patras, Navarino, Argostoli and those Italians of Brindisi and Taranto, in the context of a broader offensive action aimed at cutting traffic to Libya on the eastern route, after the heavy losses suffered by the axis convoys in route on the central and western Mediterranean they had recommended to the Supreme Command, Supermarina, to Superaereo and OBS, to find a solution to the very serious supply problem by moving the axis of convoys on the route Greece-Crete-Cyrenaica-Tripolitania. Supermarina organized Operation M.41 consistent in sending to Libya three convoys composed of 8 fast ships escorted by 8 DD. and two TB. for the close protection and the Naval Battle Fleet as indirect, after the directives issued by the Supreme Command, declared that the convoy was scheduled to arrive in Libya at any cost.

The route of and convoys departed from Taranto and through Navarino and Argostoli was to continue for Benghazi including was intended convoy n. 2 and to Tripoli convoys n. 1 and n. 3.

While Supermarina made to flow between Taranto, Messina and Argostoli all available torpedo boats, Superaereo took charge of the air escort by sending fighter units for the protection of convoys, including as mentioned the 18th Group CT. sent to Araxos.

On 12 December the MC.200 and CR.42 of the 18th Group began escort service on the sky of Argostoli where they were pouring the vessels M.41 and was countering a first attack by "Blenheim" on its port while fortunately an oncoming pair of CR.42 successor in turn of escort. The four fighters attacked the bombers succeeded in shooting down two (2nd Lt. Neumayer and Sgt. Corsi) other one damaged which fell during the return to Egypt.

Certainly the British were aware of the big operation since bombing Taranto and Brindisi, Patras, Navarino and Argostoli.

On the evening of the 13th, the result of information received about the sailing of the MF from Alexandria., operation M.41 was suspended, but two cargo ships had been torpedoed and sunk in the Gulf of Taranto by the submarine "Upright". The morning of the 14th also the "Vittorio Veneto" was hit by a torpedo, from a submarine.[342]

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It was necessary to reorganize the operation from scratch which was given the acronym M.42; merchant ships were reduced to 4 with 8 between DD and TB as escort and with a load of 3000 tons fuel, 1200 tons of ammunition, 312 vehicles, about 10,000 tons of the various materials for the Italian and German armed forces. The Air Force Command-Aegean and that of Greece, the command of X CAT and of II CAT in Sicily were interested to provide the necessary air escort the convoy and to support Naval Force with B.B. "Doria", "Cesare", "Littorio" and "Duilio" 5 cruisers., 13 DD.

The air support provided for: long-range reconnaissance, anti-submarine protection, direct defense of the ships.

On December 16, operation M.42 was implemented with the sailing of the cargo ships from Taranto in the afternoon, followed a few hours later by the support groups and backup, and beginning from the next day, the Air Force, begins its service from sunrise to sunset with pairs of MC.200 that were detected every two hours, with twin-engine Ju.88 and Bf.110 direct external protection of naval formations, with Cant.501 in anti-submarine mission.

Navigation continued regularly despite reporting sightings of enemy ships navigating in the direction of Malta who were repeatedly attacked by Italian torpedo bombers and Germanic bombers with no particular results, which resulted in ships at sunset in a naval battle which resolved without consequences on the one hand and on the other, but that did not stop the convoy proceeding in its planned destinations to Benghazi and Tripoli. In night of the 18th Force K sailing from Malta to intercept the Italian convoy now arriving in the waters of Cyrenaica, runs on an Italian minefield and losing the cruiser "Neptune", the DD "Kandahar" while seriously damaged the "Aurora" and "Penelope", and also because the cruiser "Ajax" was damaged by weather, the infamous Force K that caused so much damage and grief to the Italian Navy had ended his days with the material self-destruction of its ships. On the day of the 19th the ships of the convoy M.42 reached its destination not without having undergone in the night attack by British bombers and torpedo planes that damaged the ship "Napoli" which also reached Tripoli by its own means.

On the evening of the 19th, the grueling task M.42 had committed until to the utmost the crews of ships and Italian-German aircraft had an end with the positive result of such an extraordinary mission of strategic importance for the Axis.

Had participated in the M.42: the Ro.43 embarked on the Naval Forces and aircraft located in Sicily, Greece, Aegean, Crete, Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and in the bases of Puglia who had done very useful work in the recognition that even providing some misinterpretations (a German reconnaissance plane identified a tanker as a camouflaged battleship type "Valiant" BB) had been constantly monitoring the situation.. Overall, between days December 16 to 19 were carried out not less than 300-aircraft missions by R.A. Luftwaffe. They lost only two planes: one Ju.88 of the I/LG.1 and a SM.79 of the 281st Sqd.NA (Lt. Aldo Forzinetti). The British lost a "Wellington" of the 148th Sqd. felled by A/A fire of the escort ships to the convoy in the night on the 18th.

The positive success of the M.42 and the air security-escort deployment organized on the eastern Mediterranean route, induced the Supreme Command to keep it efficient until the general situation in the Mediterranean was re-established as expected by the Axis after the arrival in Sicily of the II CAT and the restructuring of the 2nd Air Fleet.

On January 4, the Air Force Command Greece received orders from Superaereo to insert the 18th Aut Group. CT, among the subordinate units dividing squadrons between Araxos and Tatoi, the 72nd Group OA, was divided between Argos and Larissa, while the 139th Sqd.RM, was assigned to Preveza.

The new command, which had in the meantime lost the 150th Group Aut. CT now made use of improved organizational structure that included 28 MC.200, 6 CR.42 for night fighters, 15 between Ca.311 and Ro.37 and 8 Cant .501 which allowed a territorial air defense interceptors with day and night, naval escorts and coastal surveillance, offensive operations with twin-engine OA, maritime exploration and rescue, anti-submarine service.[343]

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G.A.3, AVIATION COLLABORATION IN THE ENTERPRISE OF ALEXANDRIA

1941 was a disastrous year for the British Navy in the Mediterranean and the Far East for the heavy losses suffered in battleships (Barham, Prince of Wales, Repulse, Queen Elisabeth, Valiant) "Warspite" and "Nelson" were in the yards for damage inflicted by Italian and German air force, several cruisers and DDs sinking were starting from January, with the "Southampton" to finish in December with the "Galatea." And then the aircraft carrier as the "Ark Royal" lost in November, "Illustrious" and "Formidable" severely damaged by air strikes and no longer usable for a long time. And all this without singing the losses incurred in other seas by the German Navy: the powerful "Hood" sunk, the auxiliary CV "Audacity" and the cruisers "Dunedin" and "Sidney" lost added to 6 DD the U-Boats had sunk in the Atlantic that led to 23 ships of this type lost in 1941 by the Axis.

Two of the major ships of the Mediterranean Fleet, the battleships "Valiant" and "Queen Elizabeth" were put out of action by a handful of brave Italian sailors, who wanted to return and restore the same time, the blow of Taranto largely rebalancing in the History Books the bill she passively who had long been in abeyance the Italian Navy with the Royal Navy. As happened in other previous business carried out by assault craft, the Air Force offered to varying degrees its means and its comradely cooperation, to contribute to the success of operations, although some daring pre-programmed missions were not really made for other reasons.

Interesting in this regard operation "Aviogamma" that had hit the port of Bender Shapur in the Persian Gulf with an attack, assault swimmers, a new specialty of the X MAS, transported to the area with the giant seaplane Cant. Z511 over a distance of about 5000 km. for 17 hours of flight.

Swimmers were to destroy with explosive charges the port facilities where USA supplies destined for the USSR came. Another planned operation involved an attack in the Spanish port Sagunto with air transport "range" with two Cant.Z506, to hit the English ships at anchor, as well as operations in the port of Suez, which attracted the interest repeatedly for similar destructive action.

The attack in Alexandria in the night on December 19 carried out with three pairs of SLC operators, was supported by the Air Force that was to provide many days to the date the military port situations, the positions of the ships, barriers, security networks, the importance of moored units. The X CAT with Ju. 88 of 123rd Sqd. of strategic reconnaissance, it was commissioned to the photos/graphics surveys for the Italian Navy.

Already since 9 December, the Cmdr. Ernesto Forza, Commander X MAS Flotilla, was moving to Athens in order to better coordinate the missions of aero surveys of Alexandria of the X CAT and Air Aegean, while operators came, flying from Italy to Rhodes and the Dodecanese capital with Lero a Cant.506 of Marinavia-Aegean.

The 13th was made of the situation on the basis of photos sent after the latest reconnaissance and information transposed on enemy naval base, often obtained by the sacrifice of crews of reconnaissance aircraft sent to the area, attacked by fighters or killed by anti-aircraft fire.

The submarine "Scirè" transporting operators and the SLC under the command of Cmdr. Junio Valerio Borghese, started from Lero the 14th but had to wait to the 17th at sea, that is, up to moment where an accurate survey of Alexandria, made by an Italian aircraft in the late morning, finally clarified the situation by reporting the presence in Alexandria two battleship. The Cmdr. Forza sent via radio signal to the "Scirè" the order to attack. Was expected in operation G.A.3 also a diversion air strike on the port but the mission was later canceled. On the evening of the 18th Commander Borghese put the operators and the SLC into the sea a short distance from the port and underwater maneuvering to return to Leros.

The six operators - divided between officers and non-commissioned officers of the X MAS - answering to the names of Luigi Durand de La Penne, Vincenzo Martellotta, Antonio Marceglia, Emilio Bianchi, Spartaco Schergat, Mario Marino, later all decorated with the MOVM, led brilliantly completed the operation sinking the BB "Valiant," "Queen Elisabeth", the tanker "Sagona", even severely damaging the DD. "Jervis".[344]

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On the 20th the submarine "Scirè" received by radio from Supermarina that signaled a recon photographic confirmed in the harbor of Alexandria, the sinking of two battleships. An event that completely changed the strategy of the Axis in the Mediterranean!

Between 1 Jan. 1941 and 31 Dec. 1941 the Aegean Air Force had received essential supplies (MSA material, equipment, facilities and so on) for more than 15,000 tons of which, about half represented by fuel, and also 125 vehicles, 106-aviation engines, 45 aircraft to replace other lost and organic reinstatement. They had contributed to the transport of these materials 41 steamers and 3 fast surface ships with as many submarines, used in times of crisis of supplies.

The connections flight had affected 458 missions carried out by the SAS and NC. airceaft, which had transported about 4000 people, including civilians and military and over 900 tons of materials, baggage and mail, with, a total of 3,300 hours of flight.

The average efficiency of flight material was recorded the lowest index in the months of January and March with 53 aircraft, then rose to 72 in September and 83- 84 between November to December.

AEGEAN AVIATION (Period 1 Jan. 1941 - 31 Dec. 1941)

Activity summary	
Missions performed	1,968
Flight hours	10,095
Employed aircraft	4,058
Amount of explosives launched	406,400 kg + 68 torpedoes
Aircraft lost in action	36
Aircraft stricken for destruction/accident	38
Enemy aircraft downed (2 captured)	21

Personnel killed	
Officers	39
non-commissioned	30
NCO /specialists	71
Airmen	5
Injured	68

ACTIVITY OF WAR
(10 June 1940 – 31 Dec. 1941)

Bombing –Torpedoing	1940	1941
Missions performed	337	865
flight hours	3,088	6,680
aircraft used	1,407	1,889
Amount of explosives launched	300,000	400,000 Kg. 68 torpedoes
Aircraft lost in action		28
aircraft stricken for destruction/accident		27
enemy aircraft shot down		13[345]

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Strategic reconnaissance - Rescue at sea	1940	1941
Missions performed	283	335
Flight hours	852	1106
Airplanes operated	418	625
Aircraft lost in action		4
Aircraft stricken for destruction/accident		3
Enemy aircraft shot down		1
Amount of explosives launched		6,400 Kg.
Fighters		
Missions performed	364	786
Flight hours	772	2389
Airplanes operated	545	1,544
Aircraft lost in action		4
Aircraft stricken for destruction/accident		8
Enemy aircraft shot down		7

	Shot down by anti-aircraft defense
Batteries of the navy	n. 9
Airport Defense	n. 5[346]

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CHAPTER FIVE

The air war over Malta, Sicily, Sardinia, Central Mediterranean

The war in the Mediterranean - RAF/Malta -The Luftwaffe returns to Sicily -The air war in Sardinia[347]

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The air war over Malta and Sicily

THE WAR IN THE MEDITERRANEAN Sicily/Malta

In January 1941 after 6 months of the war, it had not yet been any substantial change in the existing strategic situation in the central Mediterranean, the Strait of Sicily and the enemy fortress of Malta: Italians airmen regularly attacked the island with bombers and its main goals with small groups of 4-6 aircraft escorted by fighter aircraft or even isolated, however, without causing significant damage to equipment and infrastructure outside of a nerve-wracking but modest disruptive action that did not alter at all the potential to Malta, where the British defended themselves very effectively day with fighters guided by radar and night reacted to a lesser extent, with the anti-aircraft artillery and reflectors, organizing, among other things regularly from Gibraltar and Alexandria well protected convoys to supply Malta. Convoys the Italians sighted regularly and systematically obstructed by torpedo-bomber attacks on ships from Gibraltar and Alexandria and just trying to do with the British ships, aircraft, submarines to stop the flow of supplies to the Italian Navy was carrying in Libya and hit the airport and cities of Sicily at night. Ongoing for a long time now, a battle of attrition of which the end was visible.

The situation of the air units located in Sicily under the command of Gen. D .A. Renato Mazzucco (later replaced by Gen. DA Silvio Scaroni M.O.v.m) after the departure of Command of the 2nd Air Fleet returned with Gen. Todeschini-Lalli in the usual headquarters of Padua and with his many Stormo moved a bit everywhere, proved the following:

30th Stormo BT (Col. A. Lubelli) with the two groups, 87th (Lt. Col. M. Giuliani) and 90th (Lt. Col E. Cannarso) in Sciacca with 24 SM.79 of which only 6 efficient, Fighter Command in Comiso with 1st Stormo CT in Trapani (Col. A. Reglieri) and two Groups, 6th (Maj. Vezio Mezzetti) and 17th (Maj. Bruno Brambilla) in Palermo, with the 80th Sqd. detached in Trapani, a very efficient and strong Stormo of 57 MC.200, 7 CR.42, 5 CR.32, with two interceptors sections in Reggio Calabria and Pantelleria. The 76th Group OA (Sqd. 30th/132nd) in Gerbini with 10 Ro.37, the 83rd Group RM at Augusta with Sqd. 144th and 189th in Stagnone in Syracuse with 25 Cant.501 and 9 Cant.506, including flying boat rescue of the 612th Sqd. S. A total of 150 aircraft of all types including the aircraft of the autonomous flight sections of the commands located on the island, to which had to be added from February the 279th Torpedo Bomber Sqd. with 12 SM.79.[348]

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Potentially a very modest air force and of irrelevant military importance compared to the situation found at the date of 10 June 1940.

The arrival of the X CAT considerably strengthened the airpower of Sicily but at the same time created numerous logistical problems, technical and operational, because the Germans took over 7 of the best airports of Sicily, had a tremendous amount of materials, weapons, equipment and vehicles that required areas and infrastructure substantially and unusual for the normal Italian standards, created considerable problems in the activity of flight due to the frequency of take offs/landings and of the variety of their considerably higher for airplanes quantity to the Italian ones.

From the beginning of their settlement in Sicily, they advanced new claims to have fully and freely even in the fields assigning them wantonly to Italian units and, dissatisfied with the construction characteristics and dimensions of the Sicilian fields, proposed to the Italian authorities to seize without delay the areas adjacent to create vast areas of decentralization, connecting tracks, decentralized fuel depots and explosives, eccentric technical areas for the repair of aircraft, protected shelters and camouflaged for airplanes.

It was the first and sudden impact that the Luftwaffe had with the Italian aviation situation, which first consisted surprise for them, and not only for the Germans, in the wrong and dangerous design of Italian airfields with limited dimensions and areas of services, housing, technical infrastructure, hangars, stores and parking for the aircraft absurdly concentrated in a narrow area easily identifiable, hittable and extremely vulnerable to air attack.

Marshal Goering was made aware first by General Geisler, and Hitler himself later, urged on several occasions to this burning issue, the Italian authorities at head of government level, the General Staff and Superaereo, that were seized new areas, create new fields, made more appropriate infrastructure. It was not always possible to adhere to a set of objective difficulties to the German demands, which on several occasions dissatisfied and disappointed poured on Italian holding them accountable, the losses and the destruction suffered by their units in the Sicilian airports for British air strikes. Goering, several times, proposed the requisitioning authority of the necessary areas to the Luftwaffe with the commitment to pay the owners at the end of the war, considering objectively that the adjacent land to seize the edge of the airports, could not absolve the owners themselves from suffering the insults from the sky as in reality it occurred to a large extent in Sicily and Sardinia.

The arrival of the Luftwaffe in Sicily coincided with the beginning of a new and more destructive stage in Malta air strikes to an extent never before recorded, and inflicted severe blows heavily on Adm. Cunningham’s ships.

The air offensive of the X CAT and commitment with which the German airmen were lavish in attacks on ports, airports, military installations, ships, tanks, anti-aircraft emplacements and other military targets of the island, provided a good basis for comparison reason and technical discussions on methods, materials, bombs, tactical doctrines with which acted the German Air Force Arm and aroused mixed feelings of admiration and jealousy, estimation and unjustified resentment expressed particularly high level, as if to minimize and resize effects and results, efficiency and organizational capacity, flight material and professional preparation. If there were also disappointments and failures on the part of the Germans, it had a high extent to their wanting to overdo it, typically Teutonic, and the drawbacks that the presumption sometimes offers to those who feel too sure of themselves and their capabilities.

Relations between Italian and German pilots, however, were generally good at working level, formal in official relations, inadequate, conflicting and often divergent at high level. Unfortunately, the convergence of opinions combined with common interests as manifested in the Anglo-American commands did not occur in the Axis, but the causes of such dysfunctions must be sought in large part in the original setting of the alliance given by Stamage to the relations with Germany at the beginning of the war, to the absurd policy established of parallel interests and to the difficulties of subsequently eliminating the mental reservations that still persisted after the unfortunate but healthy sunset of the parallel war, if one considers that still in January 1941, in the midst of the Libyan debacle, the General Staff, in which General Cavallero had by then taken up office, unilaterally assumed the right to reject the offer made by the Luftwaffe to transfer to Libya (Tripolitania or Cyrenaica) two Groups of Stukas and one of Destroyers to provide valid tactical support to the Italian units retreating in Cyrenaica or besieged in Marmarica, offers rejected in contrast with the requests of the Marshal Graziani, together with the proposals to provide significant Flak units for the defense of Tripoli, adducing as a valid reason for the refusal, the national pride that would have been undermined by accepting the military and technical aid of the ally, if one considers that later in the war, we had to depend to a large extent on German supplies to continue fighting, and what the USA did in favor of England and the USSR, with the decisive military supplies abundantly granted.[349]

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Verbindungsstab des Oberbefehlshabers
der Luftwaffe
zur Kgl. Italienischen Luftwaffe
Nr.prot.802/41 segreto.

Rom , il 5 febbraio 41.

A

S u p e r a e r e o

e per conoscenza a G a b a e r e o .

Oggetto : Protezione di velivoli contro bombardamenti.

Al Signor Reichsmarschall è stato rapportato, che i danni causati a Catania dagli attacchi aerei sono stati in parte cagionati dal fatto, che nell' aeroporto di Catania, come sugli altri aeroporti della Sicilia, gli apparecchi sono troppo addensati e ciò per due ragioni :

1) Perchè gli aeroporti sono in parte ancora occupati da velivoli italiani.

2) Perchè i proprietari dei terreni adiacenti non permettono lo spostamento e diradamento degli apparecchi, giacchè non esiste alcuna legge di guerra, che li costringa a cedere il loro terreno per questo scopo.

Il X° Corpo Aereo è in trattative con proprietari per ottenere amichelvolmente dietro pagamento il permesso di utilizzare il terreno necessario per il diradamento.

Ho ordine da parte del Signor Reichsmarschall di pregare codesto Superaereo di voler cortesemente interessare le Prefetture ed Autorità competenti, affinchè le trattative in corso da parte del X° Corpo Aereo siano appoggiate con tutti i mezzi a loro disposizione, onde rendere possibile una rapida soluzione della questione, che riveste per le Forze Aeree Tedesche in Italia il massimo interesse.

M. d. L.

It was all too evident that residual reasons of misjudged national prestige and different aspects of moral conceptions had caused the generous and necessary German offer to be declined and rejected, but it is also true that a hundred excellent aircraft supplied by the ally Germany, including the deadly Stukas, would have been decisive in stopping, destroying and defeating the now exhausted British armoured units in Cyrenaica and saving the 10th Army from the mortifying defeat of Beda Fomm which would have caused, shortly afterwards, much more serious moral and material damage to Italian military prestige, causing Stamage to immediately invoke that urgent intervention of the Afrika Korps and the German air units which proved to be more than ever opportune and decisive for the subsequent offensive and defensive operations in North Africa.

The arrival in Italy of the German X Air Corps was greeted by Gen. Pricolo with a warm welcome message (Sheet of orders Secret n. 001), which is reproduced in full:[350]

MINISTERO DELL'AERONAUTICA

FOGLIO D'ORDINI SEGRETO N. 001

1 Gennaio 1941 - Anno XIX

CORPO AEREO TEDESCO

In questi giorni Reparti della valorosa Aeronautica tedesca, che si sono già coperti di gloria nei cieli del Nord, stanno trasferendosi in alcune nostre basi meridionali per concorrere all'aspra lotta aeronavale che attualmente si svolge nel bacino Mediterraneo dove, in questo periodo, la comune nemica ha addensato le sue maggiori forze.

Il Corpo Aereo Tedesco deve essere considerato come una Grande Unità italiana e pertanto i Comandanti delle G. U., degli Stormi e degli Aeroporti direttamente o indirettamente interessati a cooperare con gli aviatori tedeschi, dovranno prodigarsi attivamente per l'assistenza ai camerati che arrivano nel nostro Paese e per fornire loro la più completa collaborazione, sia nel campo logistico che in quello operativo.

La cortesia del tratto e della parola, il largo scambio del saluto ed ogni formale atteggiamento militare, renderanno più manifesti i nostri sentimenti di cameratismo e di ospitalità.

Il comune lavoro legherà sempre più gli spiriti già agguerriti dalle lotte trascorse e li cementerà nella più intima fratellanza d'armi quale potrà risultare dall'impiego di Reparti Italiani e Tedeschi concorrenti alla medesima azione.

Sicuro di interpretare il pensiero ed i sentimenti di tutti gli aviatori d'Italia rivolgo ai valorosi camerati alleati il più fervido saluto mentre si accingono a combattere nei nostri cieli le stesse nostre battaglie ai fini dell'immancabile comune Vittoria.

p. IL MINISTRO
PRICOLO

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An He 111 of KG 30 parked on a Sicilian airport. The X Fl Kps possessed 200 twin-engine bombers, 90 Stukas, 60 destroyers, 100 fighters. A force of about 450 aircraft and men very well-trained and equipped.

While the X CAT settled in Southern Italy the OKL appointed as a general officer, liaison with the Italian Air Ministry, Gen. Ritter von Pohl (General der Deutschen Luftwaffe Zur Kgl. Ital. LW) who had a particular command called Italuft, who was to act as a link to every request, clarification, relations and relations between the G.S./RA and Stabs/OKL.

As the official liaison between the X CAT and the G.S./RA was appointed Col. Von Donath and the for Italian side Gen. Pricolo chose one of the (best and superior officers prepared Italian Air Force pilot Col. Riccardo Helmut Seidl - excellent knowledge of the German language and valiant fighter, which was designed in the X CAT command headquarters in Taormina with a core of specialists cipher office workers and communications including the Lt. D. Lombardi and C. Rustia, the Sgt. P. Serra, A. Pilone, E. Brotini, P. Cestrone, the first airmen T. Piana specialists, V. Repetti, O. Piuma.

The G.S.A prepared to emanate through the circular n. 460/S, 642/S and 968/S all the rules and regulations concerning the legal status, economic and administrative material for the staff of the German Armed Forces in Italy.

The set is updated and location of flight units, the Flak, technical logistics organization of X CAT in southern Italy and Libya was sent to G.S.A by Col. Seidl and resulted as follows:

Flight units

Catania - Command 1st Strategic Reconnaissance Group (F) - Sqd. 121st and 123rd. Command 1st Bombardment Wing Experimental (II-III/LG.I) with 4th- 7th -8th technical and logistical Co.

Gerbini -III/30th Bombardment Wing (KG. 30) with the 7th technical and logistics Co..

Comiso -II 26th Bombardment Wing (KG. 26) with the 4th and 5th technical and logistical Co..

2nd Sqd./4th Wing (Torpedo / Minelayer) of KG. 4 10th technical Co..

Trapani - Command I° Stukas Wing. II - III St. - G.l, 1st, 2nd, 7th and 8th. technical and logistical Co.

El Machina - II/St.G.2 with, 2nd, 4th technical logistics Cp. (5th Co. Technical at Grottaglie).

Palermo -III/26th Heavy Fighter Wing (ZG. 26) with 2 Sqds. and 7th Technical Co..

2 Sqd. at Castelbenito, 8th technical logistics Co. I.N.A. - I/27th Fighter Wing (I/JG.27).

Gela – 7th Sqd. 26th Fighter Wing (7/IG.26).[351]

Gen. D.A. Silvio Scaroni M.O. v.m new Air Force commander in Sicily after their return to the Veneto of the 2nd Air Fleet. In 1941 the airpower of Sicily suffered a decrease in operational capacity.

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1st Sqd. 3rd Wing, Night Fighters (I/NJG.3).
Catania - Air Transport Command X CAT.
Reggio Calabria - Command Wing for Special Employment (Zv.b.) 1st technical and logistics Co..
Catania - III Transport Group (Zv.b.) 2nd G. technical and logistics.
Comiso -104th Group Zvb. Transport - 2nd technical and logistics Co..
Aircraft Sanitation Service - flight sections (Catania, Trapani, Comiso, Palermo, Reggio Calabria, North Africa, Gela).
Syracuse -6th Rescue Sqd..
I.N.A. - 2 (H) Reconnaissance Group tactical for DAK.
Tripoli - Plane Rescue unit Command. Catania - transport Sqd. of the General Staff.
The equipment included reconnaissance aircraft, bombers, torpedo, mine-laying Ju.88 and He.111, Stukas Ju, 87, heavy and night fighters Bf.110, fighters Bf.109, Ju.52 transport, Do.24, He.59, W.34, Fi.156.

Ju.88	n. 84
He.111	n. 48
Ju.87	n. 72
Bf.110	n. 36
Bf.109	n. 24
Ju.52	n. 36
Ju.52/S	n. 12
He.59	n. 8
Fi.156	n. 12

Anti-aircraft artillery –Flak
102nd A/A. Art. Regiment. -Catania.
38th A/A. Art. Regiment -Gerbini, Comiso, Gela. 180 A/A. Art. Regiment. -Trapani, Palermo ,.
25th A/A. Art. Regiment -Reggio Calabria, Catania, Taormina.
841st A/A. Art. Regiment -Sirte, El Machina.
Depots, transport fleets, warehouses in Catania, Reggio Calabria, Sirte.
Cannons 88/56; 37 machine guns and 20 mm (4 pieces of battery).
1st group motorized anti-aircraft I.N.A.
Telecommunications - Flight Assistance
40th Regiment Telecommunication -Catania.
1st Battalion -Catania, Taormina.
Radio intercepts Co. - Taormina.
2nd Battalion - Palermo, Syracuse.
7th Co. -Palermo Aircraft sighting.
3rd Battalion. -Reggio Calabria, Siracusa, Catania. Workshops, warehouse, fleet, - warehouses Catania, Messina.[352]

German airmen in a lesson of Italian. A special operations group called Flieger Fuhrer "Afrika" was detached from the X Fl. KPS, for the tactical support to the DAK of Gen. Erwin Rommel.

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Flight sections of Ju.52 with receiver-transmitter devices for flying connections.
airports commands – Italy
(Catania, Trapani, Comiso, Palermo, Gerbini, Gela, Reggio Calabria).
Airports commands - I.N.A.
(Castelbenito, El Machina, Sirte, Derna).
Repair shops and parts of aircraft spare parts stores
(Catania, Trapani, Comiso, Palermo) motorized Workshop Flieger Fuhrer Afrika.
parts warehouse Ju.88 - Catania.
parts warehouse Ju., 87 -Trapani.
parts warehouse He.111 - Comiso.
parts warehouse Bf.110-Ju.52 -Palermo.
Aircraft spare parts warehouse several -Flak, Tripoli.
Logistic service
Convoys: deposits and fuel-lubricants (Catania, Trapani, Comiso, Palermo, North Africa).
Trucking service
Convoys (aircraft equipment owned property, technical equipment) Catania, Palermo, Gerbini, North Africa.
Airport labor Service
Catania, North Africa.
Service Technician Repairs Vehicles
Trapani, Comiso.
Health Service.
Directorate -Taormina
Infirmaries-Catania, Naples, Tripoli.
9 Sections flight medical aircraft.
State Property Directorate
Deposits material public domain and works
Catania, Palermo, Trapani, Gela, Gerbini, Comiso, Reggio Calabria, Tripoli.
Commissioner service
Deposits clothing, food, comfort materials -Catania, Tripoli.[353]

First aircraft accidents to aircraft of X Fl Kps. in transit towards Sicily. Ju.88 one of LG's (Wing experimental model) in landing in Villafranca Veronese hits the corner of a hangar.

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Military Justice
Military Tribunal -Catania.
detached section -Tripoli.
Various organizations
Company Press-Propaganda (PK) -Acireale. radio wagons Squad - mobil cinema -Marsala.
Feldpost (Military Post)
Fp. K.622 -Messina.
Fp. K.615 -Tripoli.
Fp. K.610 -Catania.
Fp. K.612 -Comiso.
Fp. K.614 -Palermo.
Fp. K.616 -Trapani.
Fp. K.563 -Napoli.
Fp. K.809 -Roma.

After detailed and factual report of Col. Seidl question, nothing more remained to wait that what results would have produced this impressive array of forces that had poured into Italy in one of the most dramatic and difficult moments of the Italian war.

Overcome with major concessions from either side the difficult addiction calming the X CAT operationally assigned to the directives of Superaereo, were fixed and specifies its operational missions with the following division of tasks:

a) attacks on shipping, air and naval bases at Alexandria and Malta, laying of mines in the Suez Canal and surrounding areas;

b) intervention of German units in naval actions between Italian and English ships with undoubted identification of vessels engaged;

c) cooperation with units of the R.A. for fighter escort to German bombing formations; established these tasks was begun with ever increasing gradually to the air war operations in the Mediterranean, Central and Malta.

The first offensive missions to the English fortress saw the participation of 50 to 60 German bombers escorted by at least thirty Italian and German fighters and the British knew attacks and destruction in extent never seen before, with severe impairments of defenses and potential of the island as already mentioned in the first volume of the work. The Grand Harbour, the Mikabba airport, Hal Far, Luqa were repeatedly achieved and assailed by bombs from twin-engine He.111 and Ju.88 and Ju.87 dive bombers assigned to hit particular targets with precision, and for the first time since the beginning of the war is the oddly occurred, no antiaircraft defense reaction of the enemy Airport not motivated either by destruction suffered or conservative tactic so as not have the deadly Stukas detect the gun emplacements.

Particularly challenging was this offensive cycle the task of Italian fighters working close escort of German bombers, who did not hesitate to follow in their whirling dive bombers to low altitude in order to better protect the callback stage the now defenseless Stukas intent to overcome the critical moment suitably chosen by British fighters to attack them.

The first Italian missions over Malta in 1941 were conducted by SM.79 of the 195th Sqd. (Cap. F. Turchi) who attacked the Mikabba Luqa airport while others belong to the tri-motor 192nd Sqd. They carried their attacks on ships with supplies to the island. Swooping attacks were made by Ju.87 of 96th Diver Bomber Group.[354]

A group of pilots of the 17th Group (1st Stormo C.T.) in the airport of Boccadifalco. Cap. Di Bernardo, 2nd Lt. Perozzi, Chellini, Curcio, M.llo Macellani. The unit was operating in Sicily since June 1940. (Collection V. Lana)

A Mc. 200 of the 1st Stormo C.T. in reconnaissance flight on the Sicilian coast. The component of the Sicilian fighter specialties by early 1941 possessed Mk 200, CR. 42, Re 2000 (Collection A. Vigna)

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Clashes with enemy fighters occurred on 9 January with the demolition of a "Hurricane" and the loss of 2 MC.200 of the 6th Group CT. Auto. In these missions they took place some clashes between a CR.42 of the 70th Sqd. CT detached as a complement to unit by the 23rd Group and "Hurricane" of 261st Sqd. with losses on both sides. A humanitarian relief mission, which began on January 12 by a Cant.506/S of the 612th Sqd. of rescue at sea equipped with international markings of the Red Cross, was dramatically alluded to with the destruction of the aircraft by British fighters and the disappearance of the entire crew and the military medical service.

The first attack of the terrible mass of the Luftwaffe Stukas had as main target the CV. "Illustrious" seriously damaged by a 1,000 kg bomb and two 250 kg that were 83 deaths and 60 injuries among the crew.

That was the story the day of January 10, 1941, when made its first appearance in the Mediterranean of St.G.2 of X Flieger Korps (Maj. Enneccerus), to leave the English ships emblazoned with his business card marked with stylized Adler and the iron cross symbol of the Immelmann Geschwader.

In late January, the X CAT had lost about Malta and the Central Mediterranean 10 aircraft including bombers and Stukas, another 8 aircraft of the Royal Air Force bombers, fighters and sea rescue; also 7 airplanes between Ju.88, He.111 and Ju.52 were destroyed and 17 others damaged for the RAF raids on Catania and Trapani airports, together with 6 Italian airplanes (SM.79, Ca.133, MC. 200) and 19 were damaged. Thirty Italian and German dead.

English raids, all carried out at night, were the return ticket that the RAF had left the invitation German and that the twin-engine "Wellington" of 37th and 148th Sqdns. had led to their destination, to counter the destruction on the field of Luqa of 6 “Wellington” destroyed by German bombers who had surprised them on the runway just arrived from England.

To strengthen the Air / Sicily uni8ts was transferred in January the 279th Sqd. Torpedo Bombers (Capt. O. Bernardini) two aircraft which have the 10th of the same month attacked with determination the B.B. "Valiant" in a terrible fire barrier, which damaged the two participants in the tri-motor offensive mission.[355]

To strengthen the offensive aspect of Sicily the GS/RA provided to send to the island the 279th Sqd. autonomous of torpedo planes (Cap. Orazio Bernardini) which operated from the airports of Catania, Gerbini and Pantelleria.

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The losses incurred by the X CAT on the Catania/Fontanarossa airfield (24 destroyed or damaged aircraft) had again caused the grievances of Marshal Goering with the Italian authorities, whereas the only airport in Catania were located at *least 13 squadrons of CAT* with no fewer than 160 aircraft of all types and 4 Italian with forty fighters and torpedo bombers concentrated on the edge of the perimeter, on aprons and airport parking lots, hangars and workshops target all too easy for the RAF which explains eloquently heavy losses in just three raids carried albeit clumsily and hastily.

The opening of the nearby Gerbini airport complex still incomplete in the essential infrastructure - the first Italian air base built during the war with criteria, modern operation and decentralization - only partially solved the problem of the 11 units displaced from the congested area of Catania and pending that were completed the works to build or complete the three concrete tracks Finocchiara, Gerbini north, Passo Martino and landing strips in Sigonella, Gerbini south, Lembiso north and south, Spinasanta, Valenti, San Salvatore, strips that would have been visa via prepared in the course of the war, the Germans began to evacuate units on new landing grounds while others airfields and decentralization areas were going from scratch or radically restructured in Sicily: Chinisia, Licata, Gela San Pietro di Caltagirone, Pachino, Achates, Mazzaronello. In January, the 30th Stormo BT had made 4 raids on Malta against the port and airports damaging to the ground five aircraft.

Seven raids on the island were made by X CAT while the RAF attacked Sicilian cities9 times, Napoli 2 times, and Sardinia once losing 3 aircraft by fighters and as many by flak.

In February made its debut in Sicily a newly established unit: 156th Group Aut. CT (Capt. Luigi Filippi) with 379th Sqd. (Lt. A. Riva) and 380th (Lt. P. Serini) with CR.42 while in Pantelleria was located the 278th Sqd. Torpedo Bombers (Capt. Massimiliano Erasi) with the task to block the Strait of Sicily to the English ships to replace the 279th moved to N.A. in the course of the month 7 raids carried out by the Germans added the 5 completed by Italian bombers which destroyed 5 aircraft on the ground.

Two of the Italians were not covered by the island missions aircraft. It performed the RAF 4 raids on Sicily, 2 on Apulia, and another two on central Italy.

During the month they had also debuted Messerschmitt Bf.l09/E fighters seconded by JG 260. with the 7th Staffel (Hpt. J. Muncheberg) whose presence had become necessary to balance the arrogance and combative and technical superiority of the British pilots with the Hawker "Hurricane" of the 261st Squadron, which has long ruled the roost in the skies Malta strong characteristics of their machines and the tactical advantage that provided operational assistance of the radar used by the Ground Control Interception station of Rabat.

In March, the Hal Far airport was heavily attacked on the 5th with 73 Ju.87/88 bombers escorted by 19 Bf.109 and assisted more remote by 2 Bf.110 twin-engine, which remained isolated, were attacked and shot down by "Hurricane" along with 2 Ju.87 and a Ju.88. Four aircraft destroyed on the ground as a "Hurricane" shot down by "Emil" the 7th Sqd.

The effect of mining of the Suez Canal made by He.111 of KG.4, in addition to causing some damage and sinkings of merchant ships, had resulted in the complete or partial closure of the Channel for 21 days in February and 15 in March thus blocking the access of Port Said ships in transit and the south entrance to the Red Sea also the CV "Formidable" which was to replace in the Mediterranean the battered "Illustrious" being repaired in Alexandria and whose presence could make a big positive contribution in the Mediterranean.

March 23, to coincide with the arrival of a supply convoy in the Grand Harbour, the X CAT attacked the enemy ships in two waves of respectively 24 Ju.87 escorted by 7 Bf.109 and 15 MC.200 of the 6th Group for first foray, and with 18 Stukas protected by 8 Messerschmitt and 15 Macchi in the second.

They were hit two cruisers, a DD and 4 steamers while undergoing attacking formations loss of 4 Ju.87 hit by anti-aircraft fire and "Hurricane" fighter of the 261st Sqdn. that acted by surprise during the pull-up.

A score of "Hurricane" stationed at an altitude higher than some Stukas attacked again faced bravely by Italian pilots who felled in clashes 4 enemy aircraft without loss.

The crew of one Ju.87 crashed into the sea a short distance from Sicily was saved by a Do.24 of the Seenotdienst (Sea rescue) properly escorted by Italian fighter to avoid disappointment.[356]

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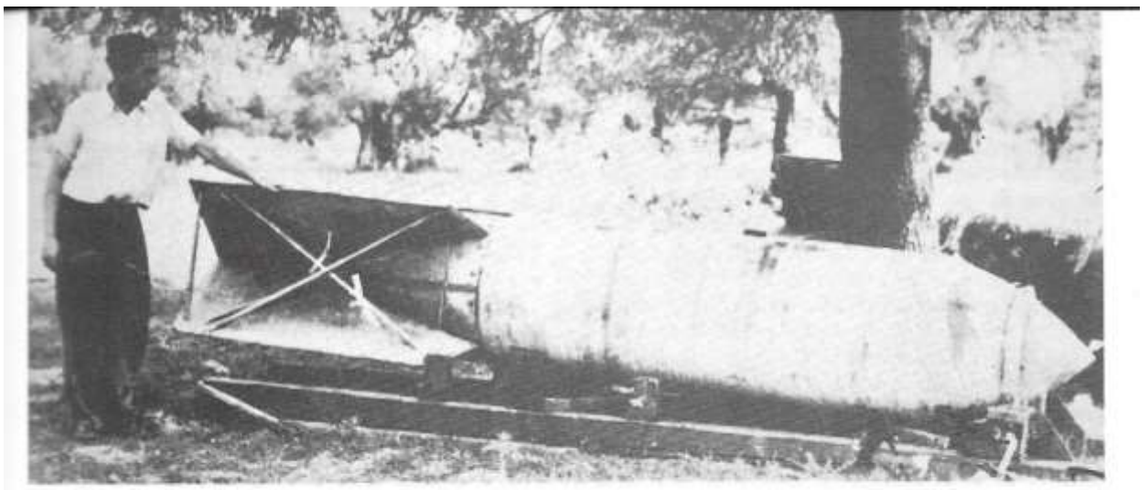


A giant explosive device (SC 1800) used on Malta by X Fl. Kps -The German airmen make their debut in the Mediterranean sinking the CL. "Southampton" and severely damaged the CV "Illustrious".

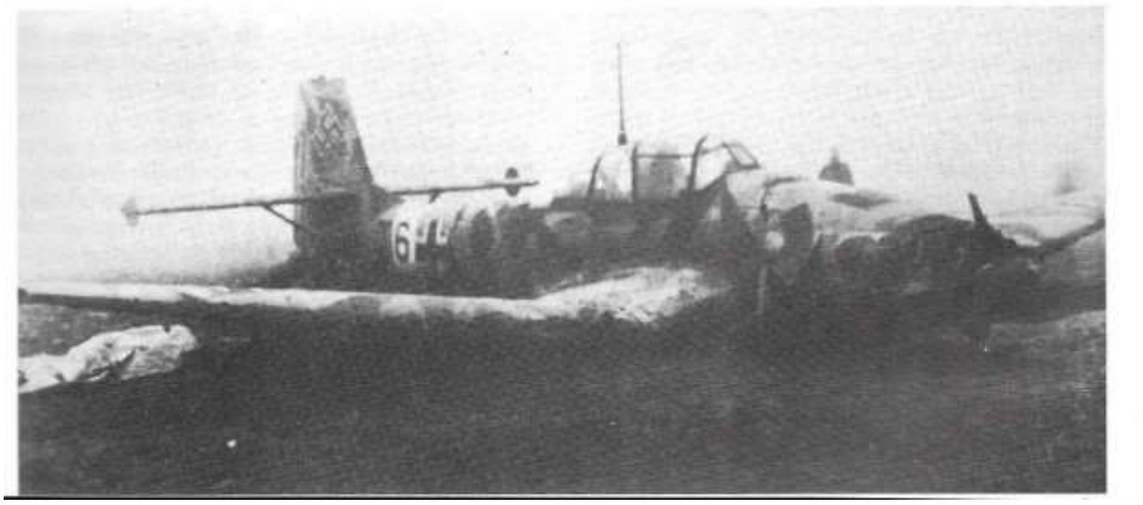
Between mid-January and the end of the March, the X CAT, which had brought the number of its aircraft in Sicily to 443, unleashes on Malta of a series of violent raids employing a total of 1,460 bombers He.111, Ju.87, Ju.88 and 1,239 fighter/reconnaissance between Bf.109/Bf.110 and Ju.88 with support in certain missions of 127 Italian fighter between CR.42 and MC.200.

Bombs dropped were big and very big size (up to 1,800 kg) and severely damaged ships at anchor and in the harbor, Arsenal, construction sites, warehouses, airports, defensive positions. The CV "Illustrious" was hit again but not sunk the repeatedly sought, damaged ships and naval vessels, neutralized temporarily Luqa airport and Hal Far. They were also shot down 32 aircraft, destroyed on the ground another 30 aircraft of the RAF against the loss of 27 bombers and fighters between the X CAT.

Basically the situation in Malta was apparently unchanged since it proved too hard the armor protected ganglia of the vital control and the defenses of the fortress, but it is necessary to clarify that the Luftwaffe was unlucky to its operational debut in the Mediterranean and despite the admirable efforts and sacrifices made by the crews, were missing, as in previous occasions occurred, the expected results in relation to the efforts and the potential employed. In March Malta it was attacked 14 times since X CAT and the Italian participation was limited to 5 escort missions to German bombers.

In April the raids diminished in number and intensity having left the Sicilian airports several units of the X CAT for the operation “Marita."[357]

In a landing accident at one of the St.G2 Stukas returning from a Luflwaffe mission to Malta wreaked with powerful attacks serious damage to the Maltese infrastructure and ships of M.F.



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The bombing 11 were on the German side and 2 for the R.A. supplemented with 4 machine guns on the island airports. From January to the second decade in April the X CAT had operated with great intensity on Malta, in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean suffering heavy losses in men (including pilots and crews) and aircraft (including 95 bombers, Stukas and fighter) and his flight crew tossed from Sicily to Libya and then to Blulgaria and Romania, was very experienced physically and morally. The losses of the RAF in Malta during the same period amounted to 68 aircraft of which 42 fighters.

Magnetic mines were again launched in the Grand Harbour and some military ships and merchant were damaged, while over the air strikes was sunk the steamer "Margit" and severely damaged the CL. "Gloucester" and the DD "Encounter" that the command of the Mediterranean Fleet had sent to Malta believes the decreased danger of X CAT largely moved elsewhere.

In May the offensive situation worsened further since most of the 4th Luftflotte units left the Mediterranean to take sides in the east in anticipation of the operation "Barbarossa."

In the two months indicated, the X CAT reached its maximum operational availability using aircraft between 2430 bombers, fighters, reconnaissance planes while participating with 240-aircraft mission to the operations in the Balkans.

The missions carried out included: bombings, strafing of ships and objectives of Malta, free fighters and escort aircraft for naval protection missions (military ships and convoys), reconnaissance and laying of mines in the ports of Alexandria, Suez Canal, Tobruk, Malta.

The X CAT left Sicily for Greece and Crete airports (Maleme, Rethymno, Heraklion, Kastelli) although the OKL saw fit to maintain a minimum organization created in Sicily (Flak, Op. Flight Assistance and telecommunications, aircraft sightings and radio intercepts, logistical and technical agencies, squadrons and transport sections and health) is to assist the Flieger Fuhrer Afrika, now considered separate appendix of the X Flieger Korps, both in view of a desirable return of other German units as well in line with expectations of the Italian-German command. With the exception of some groups bombers who were stationed in Crete after the conquest, the overall situation obviously could not be defined as positive, both for the diminished presence of the Luftwaffe, both for the increased British ability to replenish losses incurred by Malta for the Axis offensive activities and to counter the logic of war of attrition began.

In May, the Luftwaffe carried out 11 attacks on Malta (port and airport) and significantly increased the activities of the Air-Sicily that made nine bombing missions on the island thereby offsetting the diminished presence of the X CAT. The raids carried out between 10 and May 3 on Maltese airports by the X CAT, they involved the destruction of 7 "Hurricane" and damage to 34 others (including 27 “Hurricane” and 4 “Beaufighter”); a rate of loss that if sustained over time would have led to the cancellation of the offensive capability of the RAF-Malta. Even the R.A. increased its activities. This was due to an increase in bombing units of Sicily decided to Superaereo with the arrival at Chini both of the 10th Stormo BT (Col. Rainier Cupini), with the 30th Group (Sqd. 55th-56th) in Sciacca under the Command of Lt. Col. Roberto Liberi equipped both as aircraft SM.79, the 99th Group BT (Lt. Col. in Brambilla) which was stationed in Gerbini and with 2 Sqd. 242nd and 243rd equipped with BR.20.

Altogether were available now fifty bombers which were added eighty fighters of the 23rd Group (Maj. Tito Falconi) deployed in Comiso with Sqd. 70th, 74th and 75th and 7th Group CT (Maj. Alberto Beneforti) Sqd. 76th, 86th and 98th based equally in Comiso with MC.200.

The results obtained in May despite a decreasing participation were remarkable, as were seriously damaged 3 minesweepers for bombs, sunk the DD "Jersey" that had hit a mine and endured, seriously damaged to airport facilities of Malta, whereas in only two days had been done 133-aircraft missions and dropped 107 tons of bombs, 20 rocket bombs and 8 mines.

The same month the X Flieger Korps reached its maximum potential with 459 aircraft in establishment but eventually for the month 95 percent of the aircraft and the X CAT staff had left Sicily to other destinations.[358]

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To its credit, the Luftwaffe's G.U.A. had recorded in four months of war the sinking of 58 ships for 183,500 tons, against the loss in action of 62 aircraft and the destruction on the ground or in accidents of another 84 with a total employment in war missions of 3,552 battle, fighter and fighter aircraft.

In late May the contribution of the Aeronautics Sicilian-Italian-German offensive on Malta from January to May, included the use of 975-aircraft mission, a total of 230 tons of bombs dropped, the loss of 16 aircraft in action and 32 others destroyed in attacks on Sicilian airports or by accidents.

A valuable contribution and appreciated by the higher command even though proportionately less than that provided between January-May by X-CAT.

Beginning in July, the Air Force of Sicily had to take again the entire weight and the serious strategic responsibility to neutralize or at least reduce the potential attack of Malta. Under the agreements established between Superaereo and O.K.L. the division into distinct operational areas of the central and eastern Mediterranean, would have encouraged and facilitated the intervention of the Axis air units of the demarcation of the 20° meridian (East - X CAT/West - RA) and thus the Italian Air Force could dedicate its efforts and commitment of its units to strengthen the protection of maritime traffic with Libya, while freeing the Air-Aegean by the presence of bomber units in the Dodecanese (to be replaced with torpedo bombers considering objectively presence and participation predominantly offensive of the Luftwaffe in the operating area east, which had to be strengthened, however, adequately with part of the fighters from Italian.

It lays ahead, then the opportunity for a different structure of forces and location to the benefit of the Royal Air Force, even with the definition of precise criteria for dependence and employment as part of a more rational and desirable operational collaboration.

The Luftwaffe was assumed, among other things also the permanent commitment to air and naval maritime traffic between Greece, Crete, eastern Libya, the burden of offensive missions in the area Alexandria, Cairo, Suez, Port Said, strategic and maritime reconnaissance on the same area, which will also facilitate the tasks reserved to the 5th Air Fleet of Libya except in special missions that the Italian side is reserved to make prior arrangement with the German command of the Luftwaffe.

It would have created a connection Office between X CAT and the Aegean Aeronauitica with mutual exchange of personnel and just to the east of the North African War theater (East sector) would have created a "Command of air advanced units" composed of bomber units, dive bombers, fighters, assault to operate tactically on indications of Flieger Fuhrer Afrika in turn dependent on the Panzer Gruppe Afrika Rommel, who would entirely planned tactical support provided by the Italian-German air units.

There would be no interference between the Germanic "advanced air unit Command" and the employed Italian units. It was a first, encouraging aspect of closer collaboration between the Italian Air Force and the Luftwaffe, you needed a substitute and in complete consistency with the format that had been implemented in the ground area with the establishment of the "Italian-German Armored Group Afrika" entrusted to Gen. Erwin Rommel. The presence of the Luftwaffe in Italy with its planes and its staff also constituted valid ground for comparison between the Italian and German material, between the tactical methods in vogue in R.A. and those adopted by aviation Germanic and these aspects of great interest, irrespective of very positive but was thrilled subjective Chief of the Air Force G.S. Gen. Pricolo judgment of the twin-engine Ju.88 by him personally test flown, they formed the object of the information exchange and the results obtained in the operative field.

The Luftwaffe took a particular interest of torpedo bomber technique adopted by the Italian Air Force, the Regia Aeronautica wanted to know the systems and the material used for the mining of enemy waters after the excellent results obtained by the Luftwaffe in the Suez Canal and Malta-Tobruk, in forecasting to prepare similar Italian units.

Col. Seidl prepared a report in this regard extremely interesting, that for reasons of space we summarize its most important parts.

The Seidl Report: Mine laying with planes

Aircraft used: He.111 of the 2nd Staffel of KG.4 of special employment - mine launching - Mine from 500-1,000 kg. the magnetic type; transport capacity: 2 mines to a distance of 2000 km. of the weapon features: a cylindrical metal housing with two semi-spherical caps on the ends, length 2 m. (mine 500 kg) and 3 m. (mine 1,000 kg), diameter of 70-90 cm, parachutes for the launch of very large area of dark color to blend in with the sea floor. [359]

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Operation with magnetic sensitive galvanometer fuse, timed controller for automatic release of the safety system of the fuse whose needle, as a result of magnetic influence caused by a metal mass, closes the ignition circuit, causing the explosion of the mine. Timer activation 8-10 days from launch to avoid dredging and the sighting (alternatively activated after 3-4 magnetic dredging) Low altitude launches like a common bomb or from a higher altitude with a parachute (600 m on average) during the night, adjustable depth from 10 to 30 m, self-destruct device for impact on the ground rather than in the water (Report no. 1998 of 30 April '41).

Italian and German engineers attend the trial launch of the experimental rocket bomb. The practical aspects of the demonstration will be included in a report prepared by Col. Seidl for the GS/Air Force.

Torpedo bombers experiences of the Luftwaffe
(Report no. 1935 of 27 April '41)

Unit -2nd Sqd. Kg.4 –twin engine He.111, transportation 1-2 torpedoes capacity, weight 680 kg, length 5 m, diameter 450 mm, German manufacturing awaiting delivery of the Italian model of the torpedo Whitehead of Fiume. Warhead 200 kg explosive (TNT), universal flint pendulum with 4 levers impacting equipped with a automatic unlocking propeller safety after 150 m of water ride, impact angle 20° -160° degrees, speed 54 km/h, only 3,000 m. of stroke angled Jancio system with adjustable gyro adjustment also flying with handwheel drive with rigid rod bevel gear used for depth adjustment, launch from an altitude of 30 m, speed 250-270 km/h, range 50 m, before impact in water , additional empennage wood for launch trajectory with automatic detachment by shock, "sack" of 25-30 m below sea level, a distance of 500 m from launch 2,000 m.

Catania airport. Demonstration of one of the first German rocket bombs (PC 1000 / RS), the bomb is loaded on a Ju 88 which will launch on the Gerbini airfield south test range.

Report No. 2091 - anti-ship rocket Bomb
(5 March 1941)

This special bomb was tested in the presence of Italian officials at the Gerbini airport and was object of a report to the GSA, the SIA and to the ISTM by Col. Seidl. The bomb had tried to replace the SE.1000/K.1 bomb pound that had not provided good destructive results. Designed by the Aero Armament Section of Rechlin for dive attacks on ships with heavily armored deck, the rocket bomb (called PC.1000/RS) had a weight of 1000 kg (500 kg of Exogen explosives), special steel forged casing, charge propulsive consists rockets loaded with ballistae, nitroglycerin and Diglikol that imprinted the bomb extra speed of about 350 m/sec. capable of piercing 180 mm of armor. The rockets came into use after the release of the bomb from the plane.[360]

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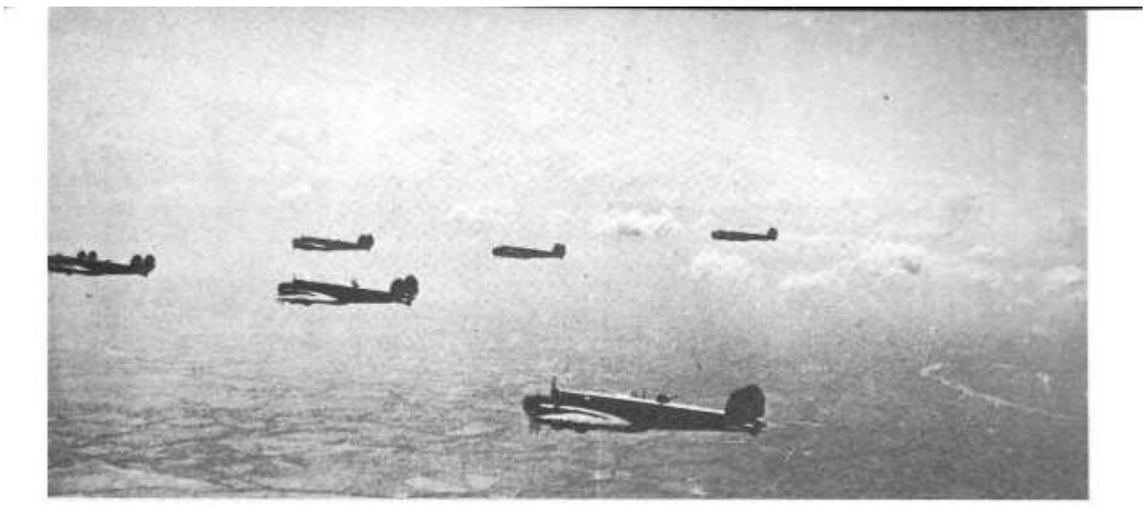

BR 20 bombers of the 43rd Stormo BT flying to Malta targets. The unit was assigned to the Air Force from the CAI / Sicily to attacks Malta's airports, port, arsenal, deposits, and A/A positions.

On May 2, the experiment was done on the airport of Gerbini with the use of 2 Ju.88 - which had to hit a target of two white towels at the cross of 4 m each.

The two aircraft hitched two bombs under the fuselage and is brought to 3,000 m from where can dive 450-500 release at 1,000 m hitting the mark with a lead of only 10 m away.

The coming on stream of the rockets appeared very flashy with fumigants and wakes significant increase in the bomb-speed course of the inert type.

The experiment was particularly interested in the GSA that has, is the overnight in confidence recovery of fragments of PC.1000/RS, penetrated approximately 20 m deep, for the analysis and technology testing of the device.

* * *

The contribution of X Flieger Korps to air operations in the Mediterranean and especially on Malta with the attacks carried out, the results obtained and the staff and lost planes, was objectively the right and proper recognition by the Italian command, who thought and believed that the profusion of aircraft that had been dumped in Sicily by the Luftwaffe, the excellence of flight material, preparation and experience of the staff mostly veteran of the "battle of Britain" and other battlefields of Europe, would get results may overvalued excess but in the cold light of the facts were considered significantly lower than expected.[361]

Type bombs SC 250 are loaded on a Ju 87 of the 96th Group BaT. Even the Italian pilots seized significant results damaging British ships and destroying major facilities at Malta.

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In a confidential report prepared by Maj. of the CC.RR. for the Royal Air Force Emilio Quarantelli, Deputy Commander of the Carabinieri R.A. Col. Ugo Luca, were emphasized on the following critical reasons - on results and behavior in Sicily X CAT derived from “reliable sources”.

Report X CAT

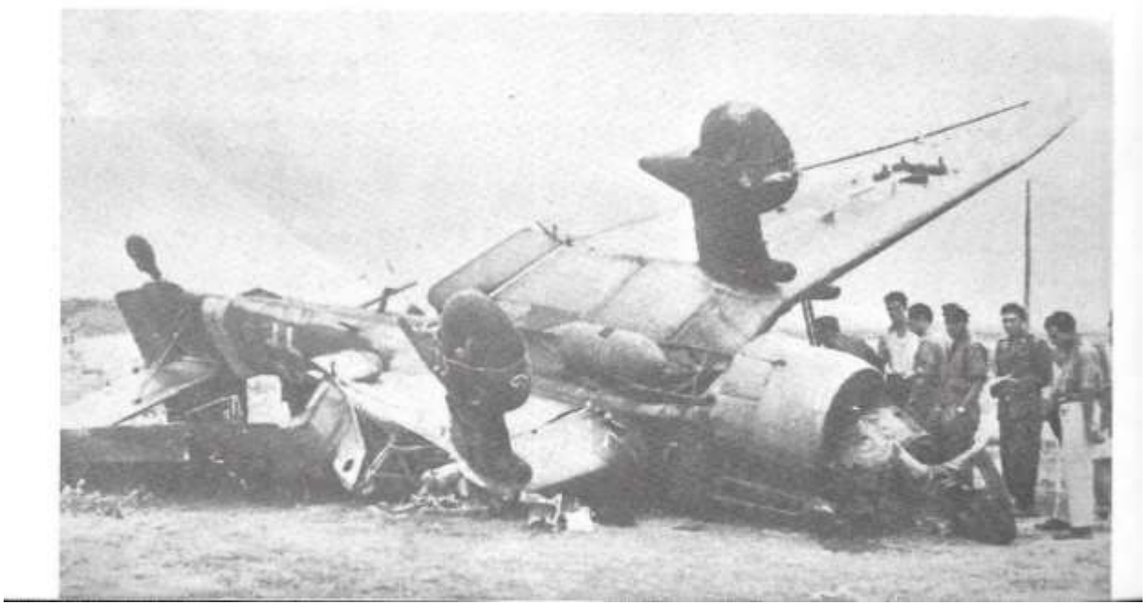
1) *military operations*: bomber groups have carried out numerous actions on - convoys, warships, the port of Valletta, based in Alexandria, Suez and Greece.

The results, they say, they are considered non-responsive to the many means employed. In fact, despite being so -in doubt -which deployed equipment on the island were damaged in the Mediterranean enemy ships of transport or war is not, with equal certainty, the sinking of enemy ships with the exception of a cruiser the day of January 11 south of Malta (it is certainly apparent that the military and merchant ships sunk by the X CAT were 58 for 183,500 tons - Note).

"Another positive element that corroborates the above, comes from the episode of the "Illustrious" which, although remained in the port of Valletta ten days, has been able to leave by their own means the island of Malta in spite subjected, in the period his stay in the port to intense bombardment by aircraft of the X CAT" (the CV "Illustrious" because of the serious damages ended its operational life because she never appeared again in the Mediterranean - Note) and still add as said about the damage to the "Illustrious" Admiral Cunningham: "... in a few minutes the situation had changed; The fleet had been deprived of its fighter planes and its Mediterranean domination was threatened by a much more efficient and dangerous weapon of the ones against which we fought so far".

The “Quarantelli" report continued: "... On the port of Valletta the same units have carried out several bombing actions, launching a significant amount of bombs but the harbor still retains the reduced activity to which he had been forced by the actions of the planes of the 2nd Air Fleet. Also the fields of aviation, in spite of the high amount of explosive on them launched, are, now in full operation and equipped with a number of bomber and fighter aircraft which is assumed to exceed the existing complex five months ago" (is from noted that the offensive of the X CAT on Malta caused the destruction and damage of at least one hundred RAF aircraft, the potential that this would inevitably poured on Italian aviators and about airports and Sicilian cities with predictable disastrous consequences -Note).[362]

Accident and one Ju87 the X FI Kps over turned while taking off. Visible under the fuselage a 250 Kg SD bomb (explosive) - Despite their many achievements, the Luftwaffe suffered heavy losses in men and aircraft.



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Close aerial view from the Maltese Mikabba with its slopes dotted with multi-Axis bomb craters. In the spring of 1941, Malta was subjected to heavy destructive attacks.

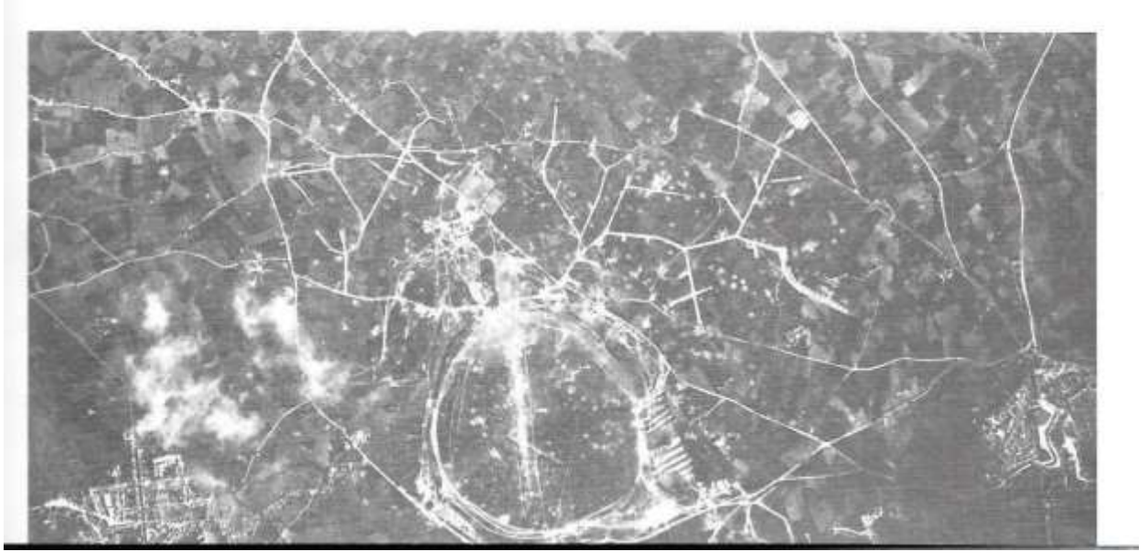
In the first six months of 1941, Malta received 125 fighter “Hurricane" (slightly less than half of the new MK II/IIB version faster and better armed then the existing MK 1) with which it was possible to set up 3 more Fighter Squadrons (185th, 126th, 249th), and also about 60 bombers and fighter bombers of “Blenheim", “Wellington" and “Beaufighter."

This explains eloquently the increased presence of RAF planes in the skies of the island.

It is worthwhile to emphasize the characteristics of the four Maltese airports of which (Mikabba/Luqa, Gudja, Hal Far, Takali) were all connected by long fittings and taxiing ways few km (Mikabba possessed 5km of junctions and with 70 protected camouflaged pits) four airports together account for 10 airstrips, some of which, in the worst case scenario was always fit for use, were then simply move aircraft from one field by the connecting tracks -to ensure however, flight activity (Note).

Still continued the Italian report: “The Germans, after having tested the defensive and offensive skills of Malta, have changed their views: many of them say that Malta is a hard target that can only be compared to Narvik." [363]

The Ta Venczia airfield photograph of it from aerial reconnaissance Visually damaged by Axis attacks, the Maltese airports always maintained a continuous operational capability due to the defenses, the vast decentralization to the numerous slopes.



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"These statements make up for our pilots a valid identification to point out the importance of the actions carried out by the 2nd Air Fleet on Malta since the war until the arrival of the CAT.

The island of Malta – in substance - was neutralized by the Italian units methodically, policy and capacity in the command and execution."

In the report there were other critical CAT attacks against British ships, opinions contrary to a great deal of autonomy and action taken at the Suez Canal, and even the work of the fighter, although they have the Messerschmitt Bf.l09/E (2 machine guns plus 2 20 mm cannons) has outclassed and beaten the "Hurricane" without suffering any loss. Positive comments were instead handed out to staff to capacity, firmness, peace of mind, discipline, the courage, the skill of the pilots, the admiration for the specialists, the enthusiasm, the sacrifices suffered especially from the recon staff; "Heavy" was judged instead by the CAT the organization, for the remarkable defensive complex of Flak, the large number of vehicles available, the uneconomic use and other comments certainly not worthy to be included in a report that "reliable source" was to be found in an obvious and ill-concealed form of slander unfounded and unjustified, gained by a strange psychological complex of inferiority and a lack of serene objectivity.[364]

A precise volley of bombs centers the hangars of the airport of Hal Far the only one on the island that does not have a concrete track and used as field-storage facility and for emergency.

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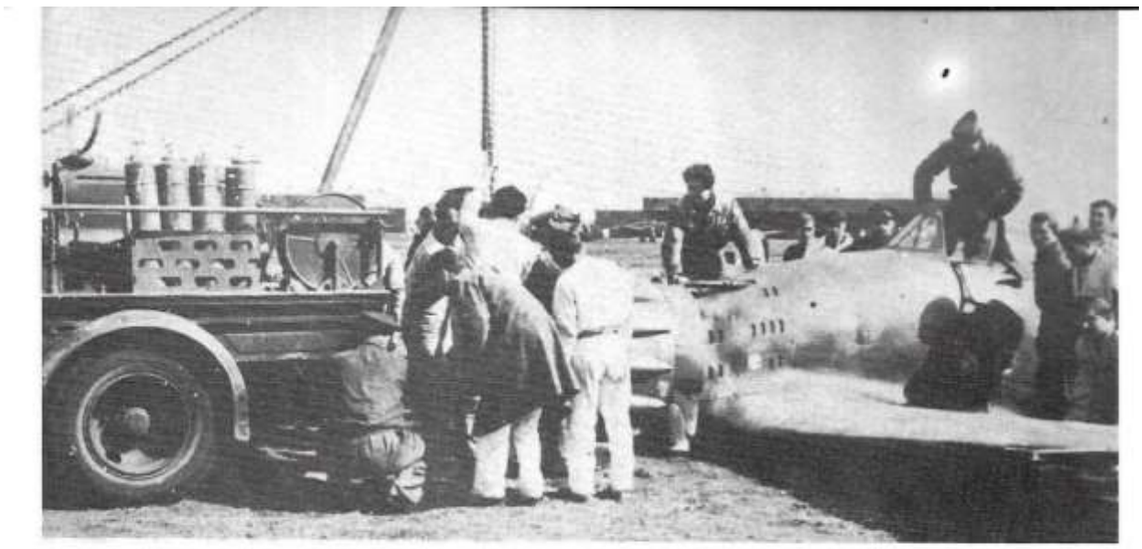

Crash landing of a Mc. 200 of the 54th Stormo CT - The unit commanded by Col. Tarcisio Fagnani was intensively used for all of 1941 for interception missions, escort convoys, surveillance and territorial protection.

Gen. S.A. Giuseppe Santoro wrote about the “Quarantelli" report at the time Chief of Staff of the Royal Air Force: "... we must recognize that brings the X CAT report on the work in 5 months of activity in Sicily, an appreciation that appears only briefly and unjust" and continued: " ... the fact remains that the German actions on Malta were effective; more effective than those that the number, characteristics of supplied aircraft, the type of ammunition used and the many other tasks involved had enabled and allowed as a result of Italian aviation."

This authoritative intervention of summary justice to those passages of the report reported with description surface, honestly and dutifully giving back to all the Germans airmen that just recognizing that they were largely earned by the sacrifice offered in common with Italians airmen, in tough, challenging and daily, fought a battle in the Malta sky.

The moment the X Flieger Korps left Sicily, Gen. Mazzucco addressed to Gen. Geisler a vibrant greeting message reads as follows:

"The valiant units the X CAT united to those of the Sicily Air Force in blunt fraternal comradeship, camaraderie, have superbly reconfirmed in the skies of the Mediterranean the towering warrior virtues of Germanic aviation.[365]

For the naval escort convoys and reconnaissance missions long range was assigned to the Air Force/Sicily the 173rd Sqd. RST (Capt. Edoardo Dolata Agnello) equipped with twin-engine CR. 25 of good flight characteristics.

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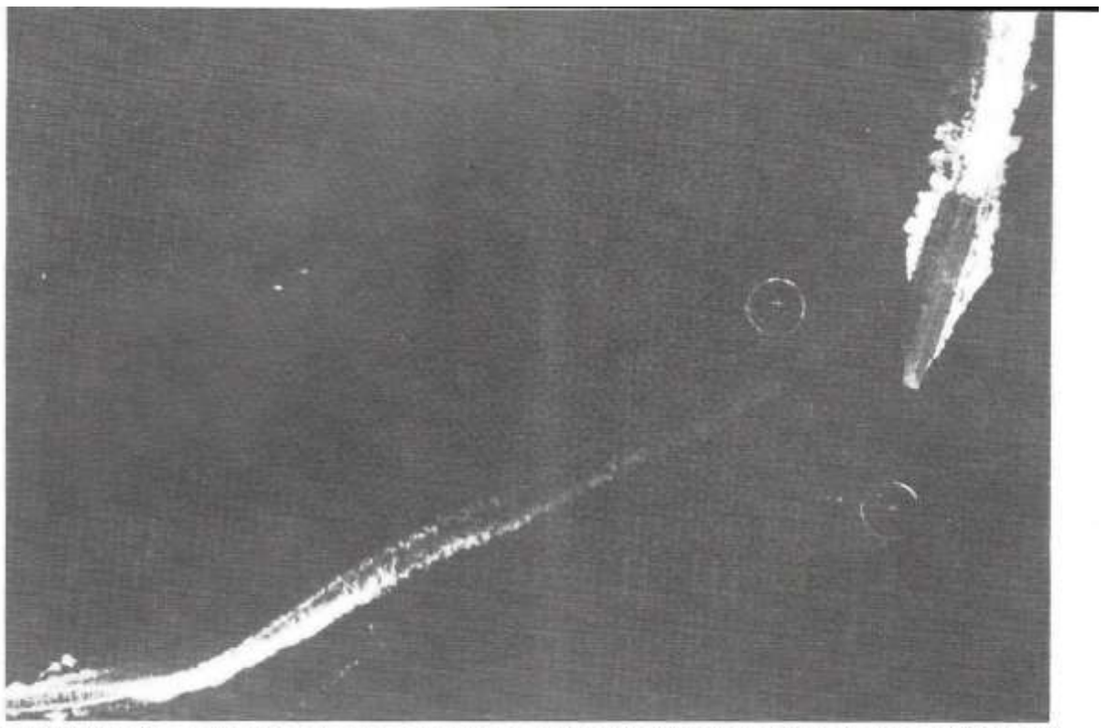

07/23/1941 -Action attack against an English naval formation consists of the BB "Renown", "Nelson", supported by CV "Ark Royal" photographed from higher altitude after launching 2 "Fulmar" visible in the circles.

The moment they leave the soil of the island, my thoughts turn with intense emotion to that brave comrades in the common struggle sacrificed their heroic youth hoping & wonderful units your orders in the greeting that I offer you also on behalf of all airmen of Sicily each better luck and victory." General Mazzucco.

It was a sincere and heartfelt greeting that General Mazzucco had felt the impulse and the duty to submit to the German airmen, who had so generously lavished in an attempt to bend and beat the fierce enemy nested and protected in the base with Malta.

After the departure of X CAT the deployment of the Air Force Sicily in June it appeared thus:

10th Stormo BT (27 SM.79) (Col. Rainier Cupini) 30th Group (Sciacca) (55th Sqd. Lt. M. Franco/56th Sqd. Capt. C. Cioletta).

32nd Group (Chinisia/S. Joseph) (57th Sqd. Capt. A. Castiglioni - 58th Sqd. Capt. A. Ottaviani).

30th Stormo BT (24 SM.79) (Col. Arnaldo Lubelli) 87th Group (Sciacca) Lt. Col. Mario Giuliani (192nd Sqd. Capt. E. Verrascina – 193rd Sqd. Capt. S. Crosara).

90th Group (Sciacca) Lt. Col. Eugenio Cannarsa (194th Sqd. Capt. E. Boni – 195th Sqd. Capt. M. Gavazzi).

43rd Stormo BT / 99th Group (Gerbini) (31 BR.20) Col. Sergio Lalatta (242nd Sqd. Capt. N. Volpi – 243rd Sqd. Capt. A. Masoero).

18th Stormo BT / 31st Group (Gerbini) Lt. Col. Giuseppe Bordin (65th Sqd. Capt. B. Da Nogare – 66th Sqd. Capt. A. Isaiah).

101st Group BT (Trapani) (21 Ju.87) Maj. Giuseppe Donadio (238th Sqd. Capt. D. Sciaudone – 208th Sqd. Capt. C. Bertuzzi).

278th Sqd. AS (Gerbini) (Capt. M. Erasi then Capt. D. Magagnoli) (6 SM.79) (Ist Sec. Pantelleria).

1st Stormo CT (06/25/1941 replaced by *54th Stormo CT*) moves in the month to Udine - Campoformido.

23rd Group Aut. CT (Comiso) Maj. Tito Falconi (32 CR.42/MC.200) (70th Sqd. Capt. C. Solaro - 74th Sqd. Lt. M. Pinna - 75th Sqd. Capt. P. Serini) (also absorbs the dissolved 156th Group aut. CT). 70th Group CT (Comiso) (29 MC.200) (detached from 54th Stormo CT) Maj. Alberto Beneforti (76th Sqd. Capt. V. Festa -86th Sqd. Capt. B. Politi -98th Sqd. Capt. S. Gostini).[366]

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Interceptors Sec. (Reggio Calabria) (4 MC.200).
Interceptors Sec. (Pantelleria) (4 CR.42).

54th Stormo CT - Col. Tarcisio Fagnani (from the 2nd S.A.).
16th Group (Comiso) (33 MC.200) Maj. Francesco Beccaria (167th Sqd. Capt. P. Garfagnoli - 168th Sqd. Capt. L. Lisardi - 169th Sqd. Capt. A. Pocar). 10th Group Aut. CT (Catania) (41 MC.200/CR.42) Lt. Col. Carlo Romagnoli (84th Sqd. Capt. L. Monti - 90th Sqd. Capt. G. Guiducci then Capt. F. Lucchini -91st Sqd. Capt. V. Vanni then Capt. G. Argenton). Sec. C.N. (Trapani) (4 CR.42).
Sec. C.N. (Pantelleria) (4 CR.42).
Sec. C.N. (Palermo) (5 CR.42).
76th Group O.A. -30th Sqd. - Palermo (11 Ro.37). 132nd Sqd. - Gerbini (10 Ro.37).
83rd Group RM -Maj. Michele Palmiozzi (Augusta) (27 Cant.501/506) (170th Sqd. L. Tondini - 184th Sqd. Capt. T. Giovannetti - 186th Sqd. Capt. A. Bellenzier).
85th Group RM -Lt. Col. G. Di Liberto (Lagoon) (19 Cant.501) (146th Sqd. Capt. F. Manni - 183rd Sqd. Capt. A. Rossi - 188th Sqd. Capt. F. Frezza). 189th Sqd. RM (Capt. A. Francione) - Siracusa (12 Cant.501).
612th Sqd. S. (Lt. A. Cantia) - Siracusa (6 Cant. 506/S).

The changes that had occurred in 1941 in Fighter Command of Air/Sicily included replacement of the 1st Stormo CT and the 157th Group Aut. CT alternated with 54th Stormo CT, with 23rd Group Auto. CT, with 9th and 10th Group CT. The deployment between June and July took greater consistency since 14 Squadrons of level bombers were available, one of torpedo bombers, two dive bombers with 110 aircraft between SM.79, and Ju.87, BR.20, 12 Squadrons fighters with 5 autonomous sections for a total of 156 aircraft and between CR.42 MC.200 which had added a section with experimental Re.2000 Fighter entrusted to Capt. Pietro Calistri and incorporated in the 23rd Group CT and also 21 of Ro.37 of Esercitavia and 64 seaplanes of Marinavia between Cant.501/506. Altogether not less than 350 aircraft indicated the considerable organizational effort borne by the Staff of the Regia Aeronautica to replace the departure of the Luftwaffe and support with adequate presence continuity of attacks on the leathery Maltese fortress. The 16th Group CT started its missions in Sicily on 1 June escorting a Cant.1007/Bis from R.S.T. between 15:30-16:50 hours and continued in subsequent days doing exhausting naval convoys escort, reconnaissance in view of Malta alternating bombing missions on Hal Far, escort tri-motor rescue aircraft, fighting with enemy fighters, escorting MAS instructed to perform a mission in the port of Valletta was postponed due to bad weather.

ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFENSIVE
(period 1 June 1941/30 Nov. 1941)

Strengthening Air/Sicily corresponded adequate strengthening aviation attacking Malta whose command was replaced in May by Air Marshall Hugh Uoyd in replacement withdrew the exhausted Maynard sent for a deserved rest.
The deployment of RAF departments on 5 fields (Ta Venezia, Takali, Hal Far, Krendi, Luqa/Mikabba) and 4 Emergency Strips (Gudja, Safi, Marsa, Gozo) Maltese archipelago, appeared the following:

Fighters	
261st Sqdn. (Hurricane I)	Takali
185th Sqdn. (Hurricane II)	Hal Far
249th Sqdn. (Hurricane I)	TakaIi
126th Sqdn. (Hurricane II)	Takali
totaling 86 Hurricane	
Bombing	
148th Sqdn. (Wellington)	Luqa
82nd Sqdn. (Blenheim)	Luqa
for a total of 32 bombers[367]	

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Reconnaissance
69th Sqdn. (Maryland-Baltimore-Wellington ASV) Hal Far. For 6 scouts

Heavy fighter - torpedo
252nd Sqdn. (Beaufighter-Beaufort)
272nd Sqdn. (Beaufighter) for 32 fighter - Bombers

Autonomous units posted
Flight 274th Sqdn. (Hurricane I) *Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm*) for n. 6 fighters
828th Sqdn. (Albacore) Hal Far 12 torpedo bombers
830th Sqdn. (Swordfish) Hal Far-10 torpedo bombers
Flight 806th Sqdn. (Fulmar) Hal Far 4 fighter
Flight 230th Sqdn. (Sunderland) Kalafrana 6 seaplanes recon
Flight 228th Sqdn. (Sunderland-Walrus) Kalafrana 12 seaplanes
Total: n. 206 aircraft with 36 more in strategic reserve

In 1941 the defense of Malta had been further strengthened and be responsible for the anti-aircraft artillery was appointed Gen. N. V. Sadler. The approximately 300 cannons established in 1940 had been further enhanced with additional cannons of 94/50 and 86 Bofors 40/56 machine guns with 32 search lights assigned primarily to the defense of the airfields Hal Far, Luqa, Takali and the landing strips of Safi and Krendi on which they decentralized stationed 5 fighter squadrons and 2 bombers/scouts. The new A.A. Regiment included the 7th, the 10th and the 2nd RMA (Maltesie) backed by the 4th searchlight Regiment.

Changes had also been received in anti-aircraft defense system with the establishment of boxes (series of successive barrages) made with the elimination of stations located on the coast focused on the new system to continuous areas. In the first seven months had been fired 30,800 shots of 94/50 and 29,700 of 40 mm and the heavy raids carried out by X CAT had caused serious damage and loses among the staff and excessive consumption of ammunition to the point that the command of the island urgently demanded the replacement of the stocks.[368]

The twin-engine Junkers Ju 88 which was the backbone of the X-FI Kps for its operational capabilities speed 450Km/h, autonomy 1700 Km, payload 1800 kg bombs, armament 3 MG 17 weapons.

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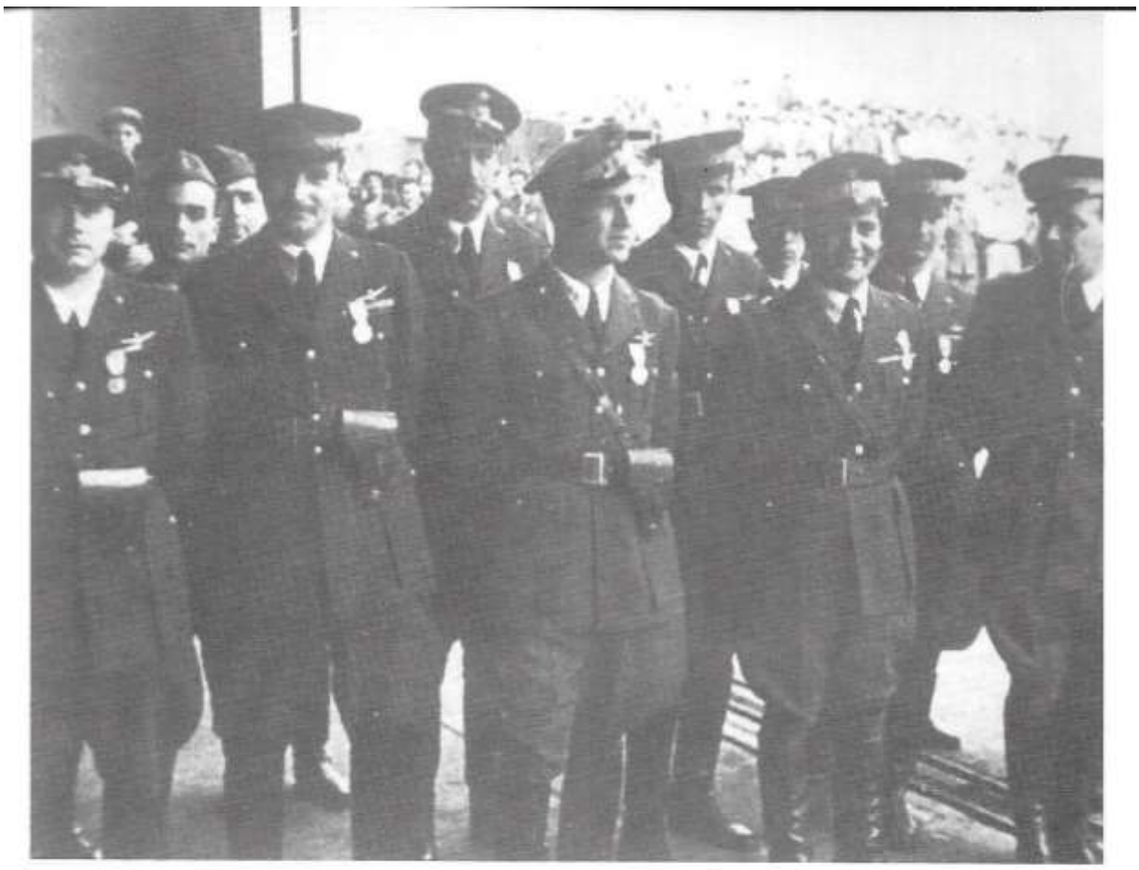
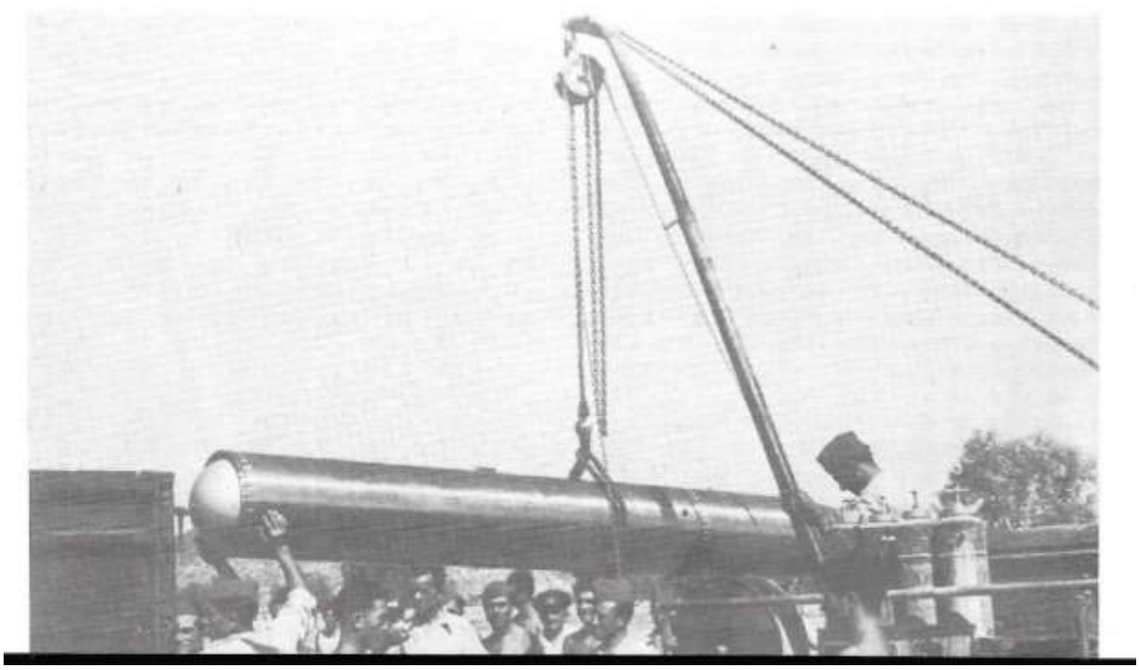


Delivery of decorations for bravery to the pilots of the 6th Group Autonomous CT. By left Maj Vezio Mezzetti commander then fell in N.A., Capt. Camarda, Capt. Giacomelli, Capt. Ocarso then fell in action, Lt. Palazzeschi and Cattaneo (Collection V. Lana).

Specialists prepare a torpedo W 170 (Withead) on a Sicilian airport. On the fields of Sicily took turns in cycles the 278th, 279th and 282nd Sqd AS. who obtained brilliant results in action against enemy ships.



The island's defenses had undergone a considerable increase of low-altitude attacks which now relied on the destructive techniques of the Luftwaffe and the Italian air force, with dive bombing, strafing and bombing, only remedies to attempt to hit with the "saturated" system the huge area where dispersed British aircraft were stationed well protected. Heavy anti-aircraft artillery with its guns of 94 mm. and 114 mm. instead continued to hamper high-altitude raids by Italian bombers in small but tight formations attacked by high-altitude of the island's objectives. It was an extremely difficult and time consuming task for the Italian air force leading irreversibly to achieve modest results, as it stood after the raids as miners from underground shelters hundreds of soldiers and workers who filled her craters and potholes of the bombs (the most obvious signs of the attack), level out the ground, clear the wrecks, re-established communications between airports and decentralization, the commands and deposits and the RAF / Malta rose again like the mythical phoenix ready to resume in the short time its battle. The secret of success for the Axis consisted not so much in the destruction of enemy aviation material, this very difficult task to accomplish, but in the siege of Malta and take it day by day by starvation from hunger by denying the defenders gasoline, ammunition, reinforcements, materials, food, medicine and – the unique true weak point of the island, almost totally devoid of food self-sufficiency and operational - a hypothesis that occurred for only a short time in a dramatic period of 1942 with a siege radically realized.

It was also strengthened the chain of sighting radar that were taken from 2 to 8 Finding Station, with the installation of the most modern equipment and Plessey AM.13 RC.186 as well as RDF apparatuses at Zonkar Point and Ras l'Armi/Kalafrana some time working, were activated anew those at Draghed Point, Salina Bay, Dahla Bujebba, Mijnusa, the Bahida Plata, Dahlet Shilep. It was increased and improved the organization of fighter guidance adding to GCI of Hal Far and Tal Gawiya (conventional names Pitry and Tirmber) the sectoral Sliema (Gondar name) headed by the operations center of Rabat.

They were assigned M.R.V. equipment for secret radio communications equipment and L.E.F. to radio intercepts that used especially of the special section of “Ultra” interception installed on Malta, which decrypted radio messages transmitted by Supermarina and X CAT command through the cipher machine "Enigma", as well as mobile L.W.S. (Light Warning System) radars MB.MK.III of Metrovick Ltd. which were moved to the island to cover in emergency situation remained free sector as a result of destruction or decommissioning of the permanent station area.

Thus it was always guaranteed the full sectoral coverage, considering the small size of the island, to a high extent.

They were used for the defense even early anti-aircraft fire radar type G.L. MK.II and search radar reflectors coupled to the LSC type, which allowed to shoot at night with great precision.

The new aircraft arrived from England were all equipped with the IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) and arrived in Malta also the first "Wellington" bearing the Naval Research Radar A.S.V. (Air Surface Vessel) which were actually the real star of the nocturnal sightings of isolated ships and convoys to Libya, addressed specifically on the monitoring areas by ULTRA / Enigma messages.

The arrival of the first "Beaufighter" with radar A.I. (Air Interceptor) allowed among other things the RAF / Malta to set up a night security service, which involved heavy losses for the Axis and begin the implementation of nighttime offensive missions on Sicilian airports, with the reductions in landing planes or taking off. It was therefore set up from scratch with this aircraft equipped with radar, the M.N.F.U. (Malta Night Fighter Unit) that used "Beaufighter" and "Hurricane" at night.

The island's food conditions were precarious and evaluated motto filled reserves until January 1942, and the morale of the inhabitants of the island was very low and worse to start from September to rationing, forced displacement, the constant Axis raids.

As reinforcements arrived in the island 3 Inf. Battalions, 2 field batteries and a "Mathilda” tank company and for the naval part of the 14th DD. Sqd. (Capt. P.I. Mack). There had been a number of changes of bomber and reconnaissance units with squadrons 39th, 252nd, 21st, 78th, 37th and 38th, which for more or less long periods had reason to remain and operate from Malta.[369]

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Airmen push maneuvering a Reggiane Re. 2000 fighter of the 377th Sqd (Capt. Luigi Marcolin) based on the airport of Palermo / Boccadifalco. The squadron was part of the 23rd Group CT before becoming independent.

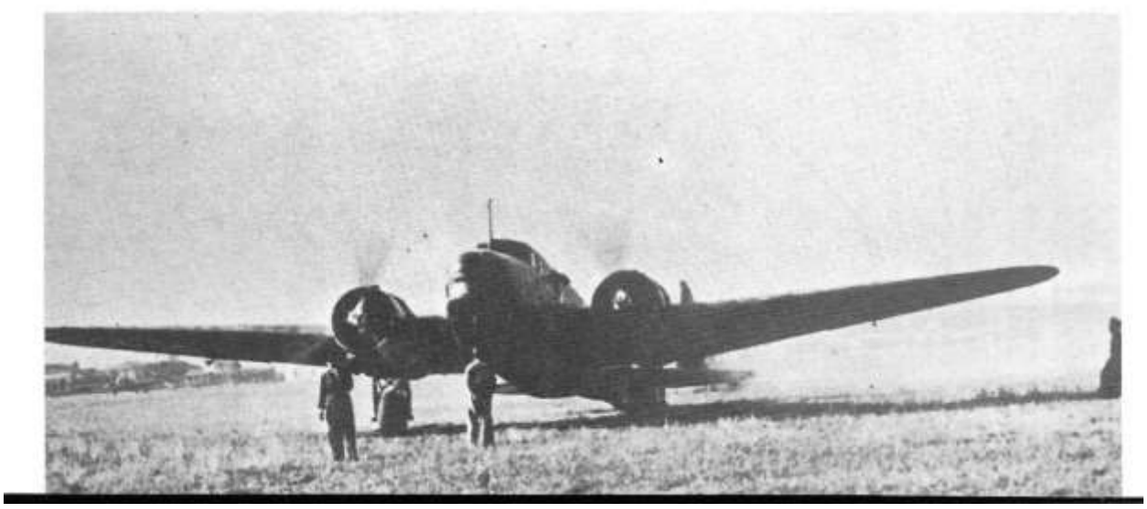
The presence of twin-engine "Blenheim", "Wellington" and "Maryland" had increased the range of Malta that could operate in a diameter of 380 km and covered Tripoli, Messina, Augusta, Siracusa, Pantelleria, Trapani, Palermo, Reggio Calabria, the peninsula of Cap Bon, Sousse, Sfax , the Kerchennah islands and Lampedusa overseeing the central Mediterranean and especially the Strait of Sicily with the two major arteries of direct supplies from Italian [Libya: the western (300 miles controlled), the east (180 miles semi-controlled) assigned as well as the RAF, the 10th DD Sqd., The 10th submarines Sqd. (7 English plus 3 Dutch units), Force K.

It follows from all of this information patiently gathered by the SIA on the enemy organization in Malta, it was evident that a modern war could not always solve with only the use of force a particular operational situation, but it was necessary instead of the more advanced technical assistance guided by science , something that the British, albeit outnumbered and forced on the defensive, could cope and balance positively with the latest radio technologies and rational use concepts applied to new and found revolutionary. Excluding the totally unprepared Italian Air Force to this new and unusual aspect of air and sea war, it seems astonishing that even the Luftwaffe, who has long had placed in this revolutionary means of struggle adopted in "England Blitz", had begun and led for months in the Mediterranean the air war against the RAF, using traditional means and methods that they had not brought the results previewed and expected.

But already in the same 1941 there was also a turning point for the Axis in the conduct of the air war with the use of new combat systems, use of radiolocation equipment and specialized personnel which also was positively affected the Italian Air Force, these aspects that will be covered in a separate chapter of this book.

In 1941, the first Night Fighter units were also formed in the Regina Areonautica, necessary to deal with the increased presence of enemy aircraft on the metropolitan territory. This formation was necessary to deal with new criteria in the attempts made up to that point in an approximate manner and which had not led to any serious operational results.[370]

Takeoff of BR 20 of the 62nd Sqd. (Capt. A. Selano) of the 29th Group/43rd Stormo BT. for a mission over Malta. The bombers of the 43rd Stormo suffered heavy losses to enemy offenses during armed actions on the enemy stronghold.



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The Air Force/Sicily applied for first the new organization, constituting some C.N. sections which were to herald a short time later, the formation of the 171st Group CN (Sqd. 301st/ 302nd) with CR.42 that was considered, wrongly or rightly, as the standard Night fighter aircraft of R.A.

The night defensive structure was based on the territorial division of Sicily in with guarded vertical zones from north to south, complemented by a horizontal band running east-west between the cornerstones of Trapani-Catania terminals and intersecting the Palermo-Sciacca vertical terminals, Terms Imerese- Scalo Siculiano, Cefalu-Licata and Capes of Orlando-Camliso.

The ranges were "combed" by 6 aircraft in turn -4 in vertical and two horizontal stripes in that.

Between May and June took place in Sicily 55 night raids on the island airports that caused the destruction of 12 aircraft between Italy and Germany, and damage to 29 others, the death of 19 soldiers and the wounding of another 34. A BR.20 was shot down during a night landing by a lurking Beaufighter. It did not occur in the same period any positive intervention of the Italian Night fighter this obvious sign that was not enough to make some technical changes to CR.42 to consider it "night fighter", as it was not enough to fly at night, C.N. pilots hoping only fortuitous encounter in the immensity of the dark night with the enemy bomber. The system was therefore completely revised and also in this respect it was necessary to request and obtain the cooperation of the Luftwaffe to solve the nagging problem.

In June, as mentioned, he had been resumed the offensive activities on Malta with night missions of bombers at high altitude, daytime dive bombers escorted by fighters, free fighter operations with patrols, reconnaissance exposed and photographic escorted.

The raids were the bombers and were directed mainly against the port of Valletta, the arsenal of Biurmoila, the airports of Hal Far, Mikabba, Takali. They were lost in these missions 8 between bombers and fighters (including a Cant.506/S shot down by the enemy in a rescue mission) against the killing of 16 enemy aircraft by fighters and by another 5 hit by anti-aircraft fire, both of naval units of the A/A defense of Lampedusa/Pantelleria. Other enemy planes were burned on the fields. The dispersion of targets on aviation fields of Malta advised the use of more numerous explosive devices, a lighter weight to increase the chances of hitting some of which were achieved and torching their decentralized aircraft with the use of these small bombs 15 kg.[371]

Airmen push on twin BR. 20 to bring it in on the airport decentralization of S. Giuseppe di Chinisia. The bomber was conditioned with dark coloration for night flights on Malta.

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The first loss of bombers at the beginning of the new offensive cycle was recorded in the night on the 8 June, during an attack on Mikabba of a BR.20 of the 99th Group BT, one of whom was shot down by night fighters. A second bomber struck in parts by several bullets, could instead luckily reach the base.

The next day it was shot down a SM.79 of 193rd Sqd. (Capt. S. Crosara) during naval escort and anti-submarine mission. The day was lost another SM.79 of 30th Stormo BT flying reconnaissance with the MC.200 escort of the 7th Group CT attacked by surprise by "Hurricane" assisted by the GCI, but suffered the loss of two airplanes by Italian pilots. On June 12, another SM.79 from photographic reconnaissance escorted by MC.200 of 17th Gruppo CT commanded by Capt. Clytius Nioi (72nd Sqd.), was hit and damaged by anti-aircraft fire and then attacked by the usual “Hurricane” in ambush at a higher altitude.

In the fighting that followed were shot down as many as 8 “Hurricanes” against the loss of the Macchi of 2nd Lt. Curcio thrown into the sea. Attempt to the search for the young officer started by 2 Stagnone Cant.506/S to explore the area around Malta, escorted by CR.42 of 23rd Group CT and MC.200 of the 76th Sqd. (7th Gr. CT) on a mission between 15:30 to 17:05 hours.

The rescue aircraft escorted by pilots in the 'Falconi' group was, however, attacked by "Hurricane" that shot down the CR.42 of 2nd Lt. Bartoccini and repeatedly machine-gunned the Cant.50/S remained without escort, destroy it by sinking, whilst paying for such a piratical prowess with the loss of a "Hurricane." The survivors were later rescued by a flying boat escorted by four other MC.200 commanded the Lt. Adriano Visconti.

To better coordinate the activities of the bomber units, Superaereo decided at the end of June to set up an Air Force/Sicily Bombing Command entrusted to Gen. B.A. Cesare Biffi, and covering the Stomos BT 10th, 30th, 43rd (which also included a Group of the 18th Stormo BT), 101st Group BaT and 278th Sqd. AS for a total of just over 70 aircraft. To improve the organization of aerial escort for convoys in transit to Sicily and direct in North Africa, Superaereo assigned to the command, Air Force Sicily a strategic reconnaissance squadron and recently distant escort constitution – by the 173rd commanded by Capt. Edoardo Agnello - equipped with twin-engine Fiat CR.25, an aircraft equipped with good features at speeds of 490 km/h, range 2100 km, armed with three guns and 700 kg of bombs, 3 crew.

The 173rd Sqd. was assigned to Palermo Boccadifalco with a work force of 11 aircraft for convoys escort, sea explorations, surveys in view of Malta.

June 27, photographic mission of Valletta a SM.79 of the 193rd Sqd. (Capt. E. Falconi) escorted by 41 MC.200 provided by Groups CT 7th, 10th and 16th divided into three bands of different densities under the command of Lt. Col. Cavlo Romagnoli.[372]

Italian Air Force first attempts to organize night fighter units in Sicily to counter the bombers of R.A.F. - A CR 42 initially used as C.N. during training. (377th Sqd.)

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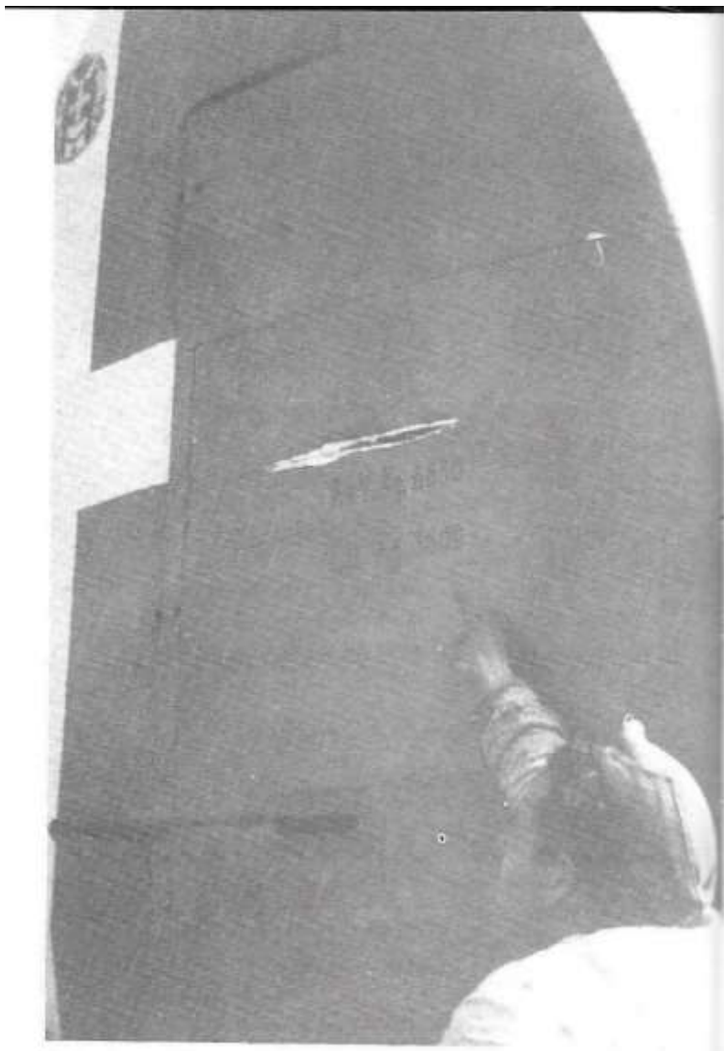
During takeoff and the flight to Malta on pre-established program was severely impaired as many as 19 Macchi was forced to return for lack of lubrication and excessive oil consumption (Ferroxa type piston rings unfit for the Fiat A.74 motor was revealed as the culprit by the investigation committee -Note) and consequently reduced when the formation reached the sky Malta, was attacked from above by a number of "Hurricane" that felled the first step two Macchi of the 10th Group that reacted vigorously to the ambush knocking down three enemy fighters. Another was considered by the 7th Gr. fighter pilots shot down.

The 28th was performed on the island the last bombing in June against the port of Valletta and adjacent air bases. In July, the number of Malta's bombing missions increased slightly from the previous month (13 raids on the port and airport), also increased the number of enemy aircraft downed who reached the 25, almost all fighters, against the 7 lost of the Italian air force during four heavy furious dogfights and two low-altitude strafing of Mikabba and Hal Far.



A bullet of the enemy night fighter has torn the bomber tail assembly who nevertheless reached its base after the danger during the mission carried out on La Valletta. It went well!

The novelty registered during the month was the occasional appearance of the Supermarine "Spitfire" fighter posted on an experimental basis by Fighter Command in the Middle East, for an operational evaluation cycle to Egypt and Malta.

But regardless of the more or less occasional presence of the prestigious Spit, the fact remained indisputable that the CR.42 and Italian Macchi C.200 fighters no longer able to adequately face the "Hurricane" especially those of the new faster version MK.II.C (545 km/h) and better armed (4 guns HS 20) capable of firing ballistic at a greater distance and with more destructive effects. A technical-ballistic gap that valor and skill could not always fill.

In the risky mission of 16 July on the Valletta target, did not return the three-engine of Lt. Col. Roberto Liberi, commander of the 30th Group (10th Stormo BT) downed by a fighter during a major survey.

To his memory was decreed M.O.v.m. In July, they reached Sicily the new 282nd Sqd. AS of SM.84 (Capt. Marino Marini) sent to Gerbini, the newly formed 377th Sqd. CT of Re.2000 (Capt. Pietro Calistri) sent to Trapani the organic part of the 23rd Group CT.

The 11th a formation of a 25 MC.200 of the 10th Group and the 54th Stormo CT divided into three bands (two attachment and a protection) machine-gunned in the afternoon the airport surface of Mikabba under a violent barrage of automatic weapons which he damaged several aircraft, managing to set fire to 7 to 10 aircraft found parked in decentralized pitches. The protective echelon were engaged in fighting with "Hurricane" have appeared soon after the communication of the GCI (Ground Control Interceptor) and tough fights felled four British fighters.

The dangerous ground strafing mission on Mikabba of the day on July 11, was executed by 10th Group Aut. CT orders came directly from Rome the SMA on the recommendation of the S.I.A.[373]

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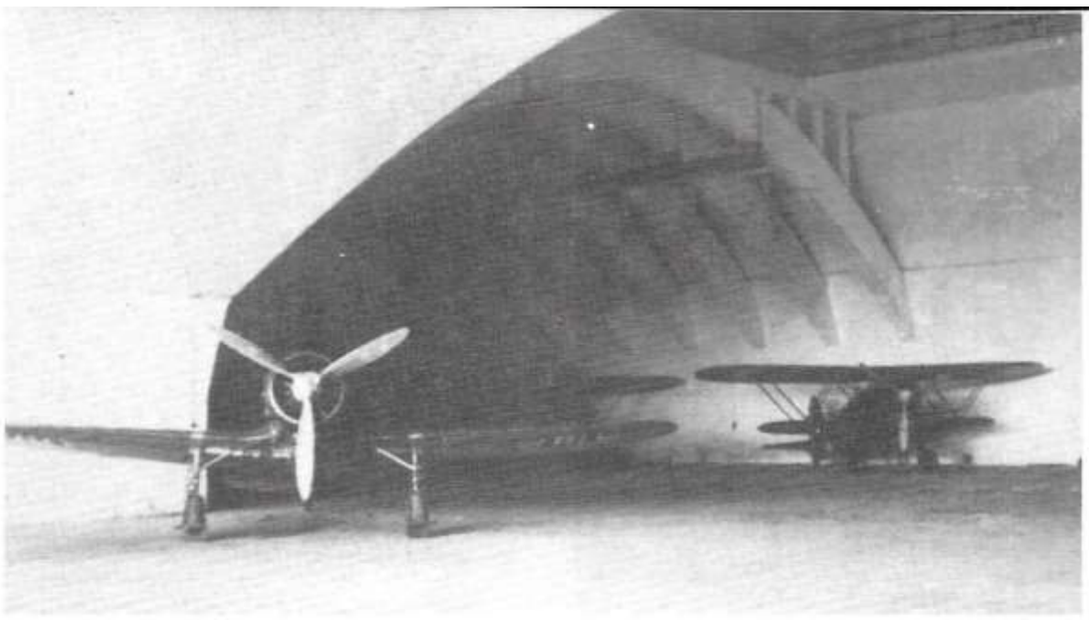

The underground hangar in cave in; airport of Pantelleria with MC200 and CR 42 groups of 17th, 23rd parked during surveillance missions. A work of engineering and defense of great importance.

The aim was to carry out a precision attack aimed at hitting the aircraft scattered across the vast decentralization area, knowing full well the high risk coefficient existing in flying at low altitude in the aiming grid of the deadly 40 mm Bofors, with the risk of getting the barrage balloons entangled in the steel cables.

The attack formation under the command of Lt. Col. Romagnoli had been divided into three bands, respectively, under the command of Capt. Monti and Lts. Berti and Lucchini for a total of 12 MC.200. Taking off from Gerbini at 12:40 and soon Romagnoli falls to mechanical failure greeting others with the classic "beat of wings", while formation is brought in nose-up at an altitude of 5,000, veers to the W-SE and then begin to beat at an angle descent that will take it directly with large half-turn in direction NE of Mikabba on the esplanade with its 5 slopes, which will be flown over just 5 meters high, relying on the presence in the "dispersal area" of decentralized aircraft in pits.[374]

The specialist abandoned for a moment its important legal work with visible joy letter came from distant relatives. An interlude of serenity in the daily unfolding of events of war.

He arrives in Sicily on 10th Gruppo Autonomo CT (Ten. Col. Carlo Romagnoli) that will support memorable dogfights with Hurricane, Malta obtaining numerous victories paid with painful losses of pilots and commanders.

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The next day the specialists are still working as usual, to guard levers of bombardier, control it in its efficiency, fuel supply him, bombs, tapes for shipboard weapons, clips.

The formation spreads out like a fan, aiming for the pitches and hitting whatever it can see in the lightning-fast low pass.

Some "Wellington" found in the pits explode and catch fire, then with great veer N.W. the formation resume its soaring to the base, closely followed for some distance by some "Hurricane" took off immediately after the raid, two of which are shoot down by Lucchini and Guiducci.

The Macchis returned one by one to the various airports where they had departed, all but eleven were safe, welcomed with emotional admiration by the commander Romagnoli still embittered by the sudden exclusion. An excellent result of the brave pilots of the "Cavallino" that denoted skill and courage.

On July 17, another violent clash west of Valletta ended with the killing of at least five RAF fighters against a Macchi of the 54th Stormo CT.

Many convoys escorts in the month on the route Pantelleria -Cape Monastir -Cape Bon -Zembra -Linosa -Lampedusa, missions with grueling routine and long flights over the sea which started at 06:00 hours and were extended until at 20:45, divided engaged in several rounds they saw the pilots even in 6-8 hours of flying during the day, foiled in unexpected ways the submarine attacks, strafing and chasing the wakes of the torpedoes, signaling, with the strangest ways for lack of radio, always looming dangers at sea and in the sky.

The need to supply Malta periodically required the British command of the Mediterranean to prepare a convoy of seven large steamers escorted by Force H (Admiral Somerville) departing from Gibraltar (Operation Substance) that on July 21 left his berths and directed to the east.

They were part of the Force H the BC "Renown" and BB "Nelson" with CV "Ark Royal", three cruisers, six DD. reinforced by the Force X (Admiral Syfret) with a cruiser, a fast minelayer, 11 DD.

The convoy was also part of a contingent of RAF 1,800 airmen destined for Malta.

Supermarina had first news of the departure of enemy ships from Gibraltar in the night on of the 21st, on the 22nd news confirmed by the sighting made by a submarine, but the Navy G.S. did not give too much importance to the event considering that the operation was aimed usual supply of aircraft to Malta launched from the aircraft carrier or a coastal bombardment. It was strangely excluded the possibility that the cargo ships were destined to supply Malta increasing the offensive potential of the island.

RAF/Malta Command put in place an air support device for the ships of operation “Substance”, with long-range cruises of "Beaufort" torpedo bombers and "Beaufighter" heavy fighters on Malta director - Cape de Garde (north 37° parallel) and protective cruises axis Malta / Cape Bon, constituting order an air force with 22 “Beaufighter” and 5 “Blenheim” reconnaissance and close escorted with "Hurricane." On the 23rd the “Substance” convoy was spotted by the Maritime Reconnaissance north of Bona (38° parallel 18° meridian) and the sighting was judged by Supermarina now to late to order the starting of the Naval Fleet from Taranto, reason why it left to the Air Force the whole responsibility to attack enemy ships, first with bombers and torpedo planes of Sardinia that hit the CL. "Manchester" and sink the DD. "Fearless" and, starting from the evening of the same day of the 23rd, also by aircraft of the Air Force/Sicily.

First they attack the torpedo bombers of the 278th Sqd. led by Capt. Dante Malgagnoli, then the Ju.87s of Maj. Donadio together with the SM.79 trimotors of the 10th and 30th Stormos escorted by the Macchis of the 54th CT Wing. A steamer and a CT of the escort are hit but without appreciable results.[375]

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The crew of a BR 20 rooms bomber on board the aircraft to make a night mission over Malta. It is the dusk; before long the aircraft will be framed by radar, by A/A fire, night fighter Beaufighter.

A funeral ceremony to honor and remember the crews of bombers of the 43rd Stormo BT killed during a mission to Malta. The unit lost in a short time 9 twin-engine aircraft and 42 men between pilots and specialists.

The last to attack the BR.20 of 43rd Stormo but can not release due to poor visibility.

On the 24th they resumed, after the attacks that during the night a MAS of the Regina Marina had torpedoed and damaged another ship. Attacks of the torpedo bombers of Sardinia were brought against the Force H oscillating north of Tunisia, other releases of the Stukas dive bombers without appreciable results, missions of the level bombers without result. In the afternoon the convoy "Substance" reached Malta where the materials were quickly unloaded and reinforcement troops to the island, and in the evening the ship left again along with 6 steamers waiting in the Grand Harbour of the right time to leave the island.

On the morning of the 25th of anchorage Valletta was deserted and the Cant.1007 Bis responsible for photographic reconnaissance escorted by 47 Macchi of the 54th Stomo and the 10th Group, was attacked by about thirty "Hurricane" and despite the fierce defense of the Italian fighters felled seven opponents while losing two, the aircraft fell in flames with the loss of the entire crew. A scorching setback and a painful loss that embittered all the pilots.

Force H noted Force X returned from Malta and together they continued to Gibraltar the wages of success with so modest losses. The embarked fighters of the « Ark Royal » had contributed significantly to the defence of the ships and the convoy by shooting down 4 SM.79s against the downing of 2 « Fulmars », the RAF/Malta had participated in the operation « Substance » losing 2 « Blenheims » and 7 « Hurricanes » and the Sicilian air force had lost due to damages an SM.79 which had fallen into the sea, the Cant.1007 Bis of the RST and 2 MC.200 escorts.

The participation of over a hundred bombers, torpedo planes and dive bombers despite the profuse dedication unsparingly by the crews had no results proportionate to the efforts and the sacrifices made by so many airmen. Operation "Substance", the first attempted after the start of the X CAT, was fully successful in its most important aspects, which explains eloquently the meaning that the British command of the Mediterranean attributed, rightly or wrongly, in the absence of airports Sicily of the feared German units, but we add, also and especially in the presence of the luck that never abandoned the British in the war at sea in the Mediterranean.

On the 25th July in the evening, it began the operation "Malta 2" organized by the command of the X Flotilla MAS and which provided an attack with explosive speed boats against British ships berthed in the Grand Harbour.[376]

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Specialists take "care" of a "Folgore" on a airfield of Sicily. During fierce fighting over Malta pilots of "Cavallino" shot down many British fighters. The commander of the 4th Stormo CT. Col. Eugenio Leotta died.

In concert with Superaereo for the necessary contribution of the Air Force/Sicily, “Malta 2" was to have the following schedule:

1) preventive aerial reconnaissance to ascertain the size and location of the vessel;

2) 1st nuisance bombing of Valletta at 01:45 hours on day X to cause the searchlights to be switched on and facilitate the approach of assault vehicles to the barriers;

3) 2nd bombing at 02:30 hours to cover the convergence of the assault craft;

4) 3rd bombing at 04:30 coinciding with the forcing of obstructions and attack operations of special means;

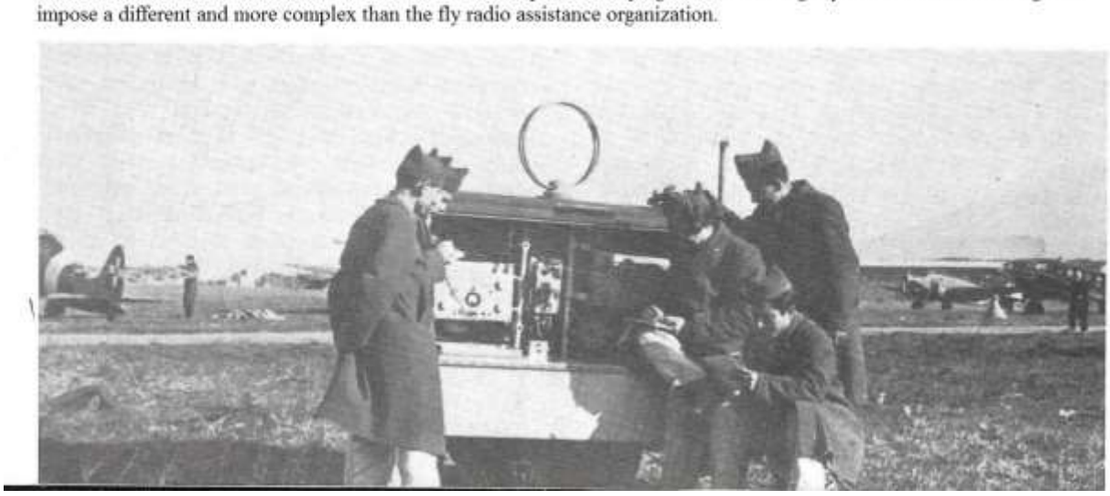
5) defense with fighter aircraft from the hours 05:30 of the day X on the return route of the MAS and the sloop "Diana."

On the evening of the 25th the execution orders had been given the required instructions and established for the employed units (43rd Stormo BT/7th Group CT).

They participated in the mission as well as the "Diana" which was to transport the motor launches MTL/MTM/MTSM and piloted torpedoes SLC, the MAS 452 (Lt. GB Parodi), 451 (2nd Lt. Sciolette) who departed in the evening from Augusta direct to a point pre-specified waiting 20 miles from Valletta, which was reached at 23:00 hours on time; The "Diana" dropped into the sea the motor launches and return to Augusta while the MAS 451 as a result of failure also received orders to return to Augusta.

The 1st bombing was not carried out due to the failure of the engines of the 2 chosen BR.20s to start, while the group of boats with the MAS 452, slowed down in their timetable by a certain delay due to some inconveniences, could not have benefited, due to this inconvenience, except in part, from the planned but delayed switching on of the searchlights.[377]

Radio direction finder connections between the base camp and the flying aircraft. The nightly use of bombers and fighters impose a different and more complex than the fly radio assistance organization.



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At 02:45 of the 26th the BR.20 bomber proceeded on Malta as set, the 2nd diversionary bombing, while motor launches partially recovered the lost time had now come short distance from the net barriers of Fort St. Elmo, Fort Tigne and those of Fort Ricasoli port access. Commander Teseo Tesei had to destroy the net obstructions with an SLC of Fort St. Elmo to open the way for motor launches, considering the considerable delay it for accidents occurring to the small boats, well decided to place the charge knowing at a minimum that explosion would have meant certain death for him.

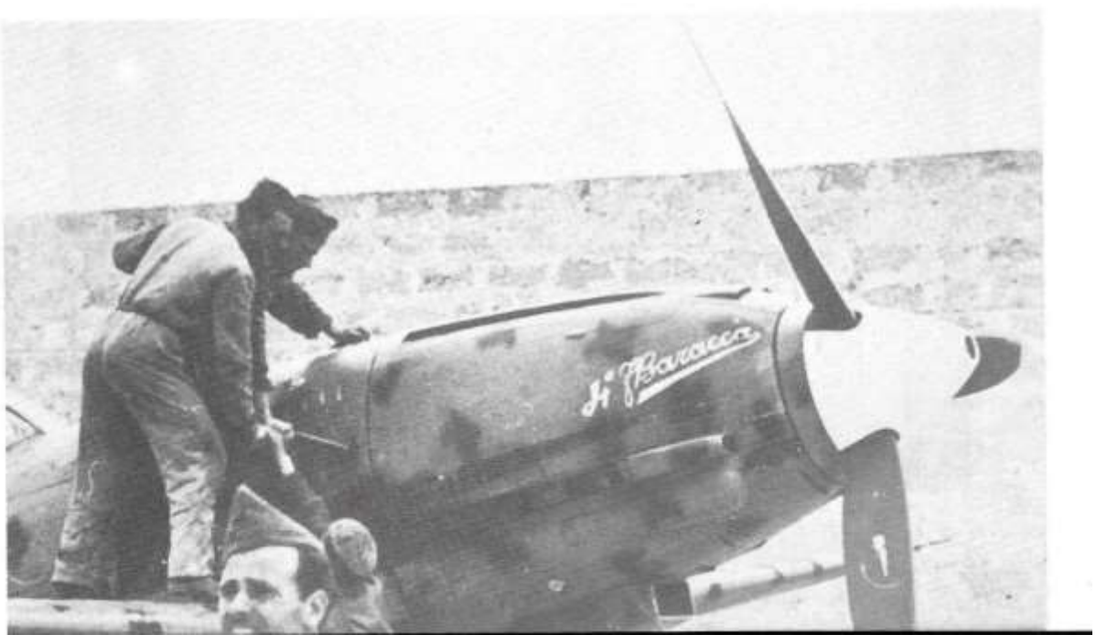
At 04:15 a BR.20 arrived late unhooked his bombs on La Valletta causing alarm and shortly after 04:30 - a second bomber attacked again Mikabba to coincide with the onset of explosive motor launches of Commander Giobbe, who departed at 04:40 at full throttle in order to destroy the net obstruction that was not blown, but soon after one or more explosions bringing down the viaduct of St. Elmo which supports the obstruction. Killed in the risky action were SLC operators - Maj. G.N. Teseo Tesei – 2nd Chief Alcide Pedretti and the pilot of the MTM 2nd Lt. Aristide Carabelli, all decorated with the Gold Medal while artillery and automatic weapons of coastal defenses destroy with the help of the spotlights all surviving boats, resting during fire from "Swordfish" and “Walrus” seaplanes that machine-gun the waters and dropped depth charges. The X operators survivors were all captured, wounded and bruised the early hours of the 26th of July. The attack had failed substantially but the worst was yet to happen!

At 05:15 took off from Comiso 10 MC.200 of the 7th Group CT divided into two patrols under the command of Maj. Alberto Beneforti, with the task to protect the return of MAS 451 and 452 from the attack mission to Malta.

At 05:35 the two patrols sighted the MAS south of Capo Passero which made themselves known with the prescribed agreed signals and arranged themselves in protective formation at 600 m altitude - one direct and the other higher up to the rear - with a step of approximately 400 m.

At 05:50 to the two formations were Macchi were suddenly attacked form superior height by numerous "Hurricane," and started a violent action while in the meantime other enemy fighters have appeared at a lower altitude began to furiously strafe the MAS and the direct fighter escort.[378].

A Mk 202 of the 10th Group CT. It is put in the dock with the starter inertia. After 5 months in Sicily on 10th Group CT. It was sent to N.A to counter the "Crusader" offensive.



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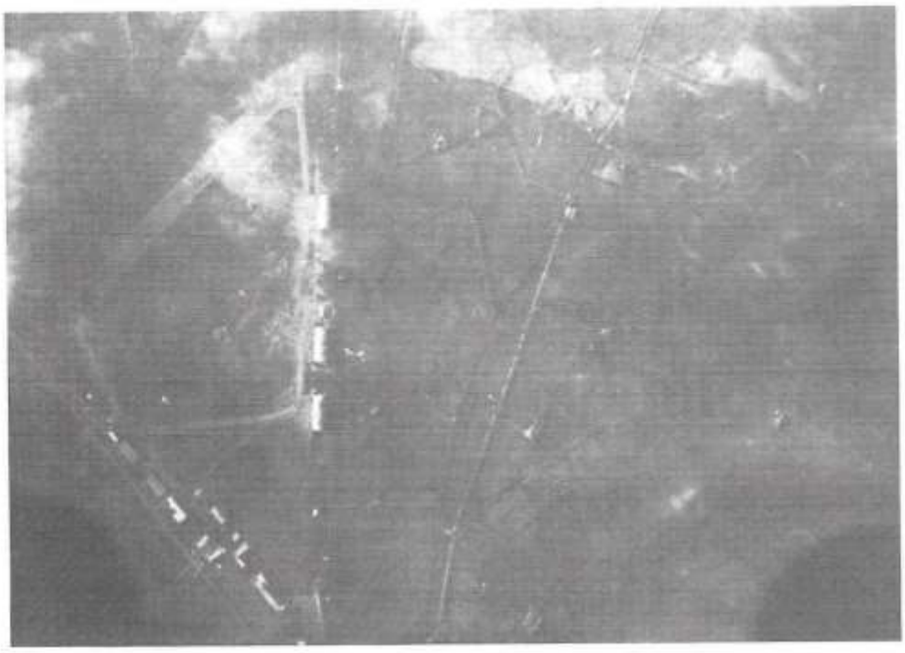
A "Wellington" of the 148th Sqdn hit by the Fighters of the 7th Group CT. and forced to make an emergency landing near Pachino. You notice the vertical tail damaged by bursts. Curiosity of Sicilian peasants.

Even the RAF was very active in offensive missions over Sicily and for aerial reconnaissance of the Axis defensive posture. The Catania / Fontanarossa Airport photographed by a "Maryland" of the 69th Sqdn.



Controls to the left engine on He. III of the II Fl. Kps. which included 12 groups of the combat wing and bombers, fighters and destroyers, Stuka, Flak. technical services with about 30,000 airmen.

A swarm of "Hurricane" machine-gunned in the MAS repeatedly, killing Lt. Cmdr. Vittorio Moccagatta, Cmdr. Giorgio Giobbe, doctor Capt. Bruno Falcomatà, operators Lt. U.K. Parodi, S. Chief. Luigi Costantini and Leonidas Zocchi, a sailor of the MAS 452 and four of the 451 who had shot down a "Hurricane" with the 20/65 board. Another 9 survivors were later captured by English naval vessels that found the 452 adrift, half destroyed, with its cargo of dead, after the 451 had exploded in flames. 15 dead and 18 prisoners of the ill-fated mission.

The arrival of the Macchi of the direct escort patrol, disengaged to defend the MAS, rekindles the fight and 3 « Hurricane » are shot down against the loss of 2 MC.200 fallen into the sea with the death of S.M. Ruggero Gallina and the recovery of M.llo De Mattia, saved later by a rescue flying boat. Even the Air Force had paid his tribute of blood to the tragic operation intended to end up ominously from the start, since the Italian vessels were detected with radar already at the time of their approach to the Maltese coast and constantly monitored, the coastal guns until the dramatic conclusion, while the island's airfields were ready to take off at the first light of day over 30 of "Hurricane" and "Blenheim" that would later complete at sea, the work of destruction which took place only a hour before in the Grand Harbour.

In August, the bombers carried out 12 night missions over Malta hitting the port and the island's airports; two low-flying attacks were made by fighters of Hal Far and Mikabba with some airplanes burnt on the ground, two fights with enemy fighters and bombers led to the killing of 4 “Hurricane” and 2 “Wellington” against the loss of 3 of our aircraft not returning from offensive missions.

In a tragic mission of August 6 did not return Lt. Col. Nelto Brambilla commander of the 99th Group BT, shot down, by a night fighter aboard his BR.20 who had defended it to the last. He was decorated M.O.v.m.

The RAF was more active in the month then the RA, completing 14 missions over Sicily (Augusta, Catania, Licata) hitting cities and airports (2 destroyed Cant.506, 6 Cant.501/506 and 2 SM.79 damaged), also severely affected the hospital ship "California" torpedoed by a "Swordfish". Three raiding aircraft were shot down by the anti-aircraft defense.

The bombers lost on Malta were BR.20 of the 43rd Stormo and according to the testimonies of the other crews were attacked by "Beaufighter" of M.N.F.U. whose increasing activity constituted a continuing danger to the bombers, who paid a heavy toll of casualties.

The enemy organization of nocturnal defense had progressed considerably since the RAF command of Malta had received the first twin-engine "Beaufighter" with AI, dividing the island into two operating areas - East/West - to facilitate assistance to the radio-electric night fighters in flight that detected with the AI "Intruders" in the sky 15 miles away, after the RDF stations had promptly reported the presence of aircraft approaching and the flight sector. The night fighters lined so the distance raiders aircraft and anti-aircraft entered automatically in action in the operational area concerned, which was illuminated by the spotlights; if the raiders entered instead in the other controlled area the night fighters intervened.

On average, searchlights and spotlights automatically matched the “Elsie” search apparatus, they observed 2/3 of the raiders, and the night-fighter aircraft were able to shoot down the aircraft detected by the A.I. in the proportion of 2 to 3.[379]

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They prepare bombs for attacks on Malta. After the departure of X Fl. Kps from Sicily, the enemy offensive activities increased considerably despite the commitment by the airmen of Air Force/Sicily.

A very high percentage that explains the heavy losses suffered by the Air Force/Sicily bombers, forced to perform night missions after the abandonment of the onerous daytime missions that even performed with fighter escort, produced poor results, loss of crews, moral mortifications. Very different the situation in which they acted the RAF's "Wellington" during night raids on Sicily; sighted acoustically with detectors on the coast and then lost in the interior of Sicily, enemy bombers attacked almost always in the direction of N-SE after entering in Sicily with NE-SW route then changed to N-SE in the execution phase. The absence of night fighters, however, operating with primitive systems, the ineffectiveness of the disproportionate anti-aircraft fire in relation to the results obtained, the mediocre tactical methods and techniques in the equipment used, concentration and selection of targets and at worst urban agglomerations , were just so many reasons for the RAF to be convinced that the night raid on the Italian territory did not present excessive enemy risks to the crews, with the obtaining of positive or destructive psychological effects frequently used by war propaganda.

To neutralize as far as possible the effect of radar, Bombing Command of Sicily put into effect some disturbance tactics consistent in doing work in various sectors of Malta isolated bombers who went long in the sector to confuse radar, scaremongering, divide the tasks of defense and the intervention of night fighters.

At the end of the disturber mission SM.79 (tri-motor almost always it was used for such missions) dropped their mixed load of bombs/fragmention and returned to their bases. Unfortunately, the effects of nightly bombings carried out with modest formations BR.20 or Cant. 1007 (from 3 to 6 airplanes average) did not produce significant damage, both to the small amount of explosive, dropped (4-6000 kg on average), is used for the type of bombs (from 50-250 kg), or still for the difficulty of identifying targets at night and finally the protective measures in Malta to defend the most vulnerable targets such as airplanes and gun batteries and RDF stations.[380]

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The only goal readily identifiable and vulnerable in the Valletta area, was made up of the arsenal complex of Burmola who was repeatedly shot and attacked with dive bomber aircraft of the 101st Group B.aT. under command of Capt. Rizzi who replaced Maj. Donadio.

But while the Italian night fighters attempted frantically to give themselves an organizational and technical structure, day fighters when it offered the opportunity, lost no time to hit hard the opponent's arrogance.

On 30 August a pair of CR.42s of the 23rd CT Group, on a protection cruise for a convoy, sighted a section of 3 Wellingtons attempting to attack the ships, shooting down two of them in flames and forcing the third, also hit, to flee also smoking in the direction of Malta.

The 54th Stormo CT had continued throughout the month the unnerving and exhausting work of naval protection, along the path countless times Castelvetrano (or Pantelleria), Palermo, Pantelleria, Linosa, Cape Monastir, Cape Bon, Lampedusa, Zembra, Kerchennah islands; alternating departures of alarm with flying boat escort and strategic reconnaissance.

In August came reinforcement to Sicily the 9th Stormo BT (Col. Alfredo Barbati) equipped with Cant. 1007 Bis who located to the airports of Trapani and Chinisia replacing operations in the 30th Stormo moved back to Forlì for reconstitution.

The 33rd Group (Maj. Ercole Savi) with 59th Sqd. (Capt. E. Geymet) and 60th (Capt. C. Biancardi) settled in Trapani, while the 29th Group (Maj. Cesare Da Porto) with 62nd Sqd. (Capt. A. Selano) and 63rd (Capt. G. Ruggiero) was placed in S. Giuseppe di Chinisia: a total of 28 three-engined Cant.1007 Bis became available for missions over Malta that continued relentlessly to absorb and grind men and units, machines and crews without any respite.

Even the RAF was forced to ask for new units, new airplanes and new staff to combat the rate of losses that wore on day after day the best British aviation elements and the brightest pilots of the Dominions.

They reached the island the 105th and 107th bomber Sqdns. with "Blenheim" and 38th with "Wellington", who traveled from England and settled on the vast field of Luqa.

In August, stationed in Malta, 20 “Blenheim”, 12 "Wellington" (including 3 with ASV and sighting distance of 60 miles), 20 "Swordfish", 10 "Maryland", 8 "Beafighter”, 60 “Hurricane" Mk.II and 50 MK.I.

The distribution of tasks provided: “Blenheim” of Sqdns. 105th/107th together with the "Swordfish" of FAA assigned to merchant ships and military attacks, "Wellington" of the 38th Sqdn. bombing of ports and mining of approach zones, naval and air bases in Sicily and Taranto / Brindisi. In October, arrived even a few “Albacore” in reinforcement of the FAA to the "Swordfish".

In September, the flight operations Air Force/Sicily preformed 9 bombing missions at night with raids on the port of Valletta and the ships at anchor and on Hal Far and Mikabba airports. From these raids were not returning were four bombers. The Cant.1007 debuted in the night with three attacking Mikabba.

Much more intense the offensive work of the enemy bombers, carried out in September on Sicily 20 missions, attacking Palermo, Catania, Messina, Comiso, Gerbini, Augusta, Castelvetrano, Stagnone damaging several aircraft hangars, field deposits. One BR.20 bomber was destroyed on landing at Gerbini in the night on the 2nd, attacked from behind by a "Beaufighter" that operated in the patrol area. Numerous deaths and injuries among the civilian population. Four raiders planes were shot down by anti-aircraft artillery and another 5 downed by ships sailing in the Sicilian Channel.

Between April 10 and September 15, 1941 were undertaken to Libya from Italy 375 ships divided in 97 convoys totaling 1,031,161 GRT.

20 ships were lost and some damaged for a total of 78,715 gross tonnage equal to 7.63% of the entire tonnage used.

The arming merchant ships with numerous machine guns, had increased in proportion to the losses of enemy aircraft, increased from 12% recorded between June 1940/March 1941, 30% determined by the same command opponent from the month of April and via gradually increased to the above media in the following months.

The balance sheet assigned to the Sicilian fighters was more striking as they were engaged in several fierce clashes with the enemy "Hurricanes" in September.[381]

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On September 4th, a visual mission over Malta by 19 Macchis of the 10th Group CT Aut. led by Lt. Col. Carlo Romagnoli flew for a long time in the skies of the island, being subjected to sporadic fire from anti-aircraft defense.

At about 11:00 the Italian formation now during return to the Sicilian coast, was attacked, as always by surprise by many "Hurricane" swooped in on the Macchi from superior height at 8,000 m.

The fighting, began with the killing of an Italian aircraft, it turned into a confused melee last long and in which claimed - by the Italian pilots five British fighters were shot down although the most serious loss for the men of the "Cavallino" was the felling of Commander Romagnoli seen falling into the sea while controlling with his Macchi the glide angle. Another 3 cripples managed rather fortuitously, a return to base.

In subsequent report held in command of Group returning from the mission, he emerged in many pilots of the unit, the belief that commander Romagnoli could have saved by parachute and it was therefore possible to recover him at sea with a flying boat properly escorted.

It was promptly organized a new mission, which included generously 10 pilots of the 10th Group CT under the command of Capt. Franco Lucchini and 20 Macchi of the 16th Group CT led by Maj. Francesco Beccaria and Capt. Valentino Festa, 4 of which, under the command of Lt. Visconti were assigned to escort a Cant. 506/S. The formation is divided into two echelons of different densities, it took off at 15:20 hours and retraced the same route of the previous mission while the flying boat flew low over the sea escorted at a height of 2,000 by MC.200.

Again as in the morning, the radar of Malta sighted Italians planes, identifying the direction and the height and the island's command took precautions by launching some thirty "Hurricane" and "Beaufighter" who head into the sea opened to address our pilots.

The clash takes place 12 miles S.W. Capo Passero after the sighting by British of the flying boat, which deflects cautiously to the north protected by the two pairs of Macchi, but they are not committed as planned by the British since the early “Hurricane” fighters swoop like furies of the first group and later-those of the echelon flying at a higher altitude, which appropriately leverages the tactical advantage. Again repeats the clash in the sky with greater fury in the morning and more determination in the Italian pilots, determined to pay back to the loss of the gallant commander of the 10th Group.

At the end of the fierce fight lasted about twenty minutes, enemy aircraft shot down or are regarded as such by the unanimous admission of participants at least 16 pilots against the loss of a Macchi and others damaged. Between 18:30 and 19:45 again a Cant.506/S insistently explored the sea area in hopes of finding survivors and commander Romalgnoli. But the mission once again proved fruitless!

To the memory of Lt. Col. Carlo Romagnoli was assigned the maximum reward for valor: "... fighting with fearless courage against an overwhelming enemy fighter formation, only - which in numbers was the weapon with which to overwhelm his ability pilot and his incomparable courage." These words said the reasons for the gold medal.

The positive result obtained with the operation "Substance" convinced the commander of the Mediterranean Fleet to even try again once the violation of the Sicilian Channel to supply the needed of Malta.

At the end of September it was therefore initiated the operation "Halberd" that brought together B.B. "Nelson," "Prince of Wales" and "Rodney", 5 cruisers, 18 DD. The CV. "Ark Royal" divided between the Force H and X.

Eight large cargo ships had to carry to Malta materials and enough supplies for at least 6 months of war and food autonomy. On September 24, the ships left Gibraltar directed to the east and after having made some diversionary actions were sighted in the afternoon of the 26th scouts from Sardinia, while Supermarina put on alert the Battle Fleet preparing the "Vittorio Veneto" and “Littorio", 5 cruisers, 14 DD command by Adm. Angelo Iachino.

The 27th began in the morning, the attacks of the torpedo bombers of Sardinia hitting two CL, 2 BB and probably the CV and they continued in the afternoon torpedoing the “Nelson”, a CL and a DD. with great loss of 8 aircraft between SM.79 and SM.84 and a CR.42 of the escort.[382]

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They arrive in Sicily the first fighter units equipped with Mk 202 pilots of the 9th Group CT. (Lt. Col. Manlio Minium Paluello). The use the new Italian fighter in unequal combat missions in comparison with the Hurricane.

In the afternoon of the same day of the 27th was the turn of the Air Force/Sicily to attack enemy ships, while 9 CR.42 of 23rd Group CT took off from Trapani, were escorting Italian vessels intended contrast to similar enemy ships. The expected appointment in the sea not realized, due to the unreported change of direction of the naval formation found only later and farther away in another point of detection. Identified among other things mistakenly for enemy planes, CR.42 are themselves the object of violent A/A fire of the ship, striking the aircraft of the group leader Capt. Pietro Serini to crash, who was then picked up seriously burned by one of our DD. At 17:30 they took off from Comiso, 9 Stukas of the 101st Group escorted by 15 MC.200 of the 10th Group CT, but the planned mission proved unsuccessful due to adverse weather conditions that prevented 6 in the poor visibility from spotting enemy ships. The formation of dive bombers returned to Comiso at 19:30 while only 5 Macchis of the escort landed regularly and 10 were lost at sea due to fuel exhaustion, having prolonged the duration of the mission too much. Six pilots jumped by parachute were rescued by national vessels, a seventh wounded, was found in the sea the next day and recovered by a rescue flying boat, two other pilots who had landed near Ustica, although wounded, were saved anyway, Lt. Ruffato was found dead at sea while S. Lt. Carraro disappeared forever.

It was a great loss for the valiant 10th Group already sorely tried in the month by other fallen and by the death of its commander Romagnoli.

Among the rescued Maj. Edgardo Travaglini who had taken the command of the Group after the death of Lt. Col. Romagnoli.

The attack of torpedo bombers of the 278th Sqd. (Capt. Magagnoli and Lt. Silva), received the only success of the day with the sinking of a big merchant, but the enemy naval formation reached Malta unscathed and the island was receiving supplies that ensured food and combative autonomy for about eight months.[383]

A Ju.87 of the 238th Sqd. BaT (Capt. D. Sciaudone) during refueling in the airfield of Comiso. The dive bomber units were used for attacks on M.F. and military objectives of Malta.

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Mc 200 Fighter of the 54th Stormo CT escorting dive bombers of the 239th Sqd BaT. during a mission against enemy ships in the Strait of Sicily. In 1941 dive bomber specialty of the R.A. petered out for lack of suitable aircraft.

Preparation of an SM 79 for a war mission in the Sicilian Channel. During 1941 and especially in the first half of the year, Axis aviation was able to greatly hinder British supplies to Malta.

Once again luck and boldness had helped the British. Again the Air Force, in an attempt to seal with his own powers the Channel of Sicily, had paid for it with commanders, crews, pilots and planes a heavy price in blood and energy, with the loss of 20 aircraft and more than 30 men .

At the end of September to the 9th Stormo bomber had had to register his first fallen in the battle for Malta, and among these the same commander of the unit Col. Alfredo Barbati fallen into the sea returning from a night mission over Malta.

In memory of Col. Alfredo Barbati commander of 9th Stormo BT, it was granted the M.O. v.m. for his valorous- behavior, his example of the commander, his selflessness pushed to the extreme sacrifice.

On September 30, the British still provide a new eloquent manifestation of cynicism for lack of humanitarian behavior and respect for international conventions, attacking in bursts of machine-gun a flying boat intention also to seek their comrade-a RAF pilot - who fell into the sea.

A formation of 7 "Hurricane" that was strafing the Comiso airport at approximately 14:00, was intercepted by a alarm patrol of the 9th Group CT just few days arrived in Sicily, finally the brand new fighter equipped Macchi C.202 in able to reach 600 km/h although insufficiently armed as always, with 2 synchronized SAFAT 12.7.

The 3 Mc.202 led by Capt. Frigerio the 97th Sqd. rapidly reach the “Hurricane” having a lower speed and cut down the last right wingman of "Finger Four" rearmost, he was saved by jumping into the sea with a parachute off Scaramia Cape.

As always, Italians airmen do gallantly intervene sending a Cat.506 of the 612th Sqd. Relief that escorted by 6 Mc.202 lingered in the area for the recovery, with the surprise of finding already in place a RAF flying boat escorted by 7 "Hurricane." Moments of uncertainty about what to do by the Italian pilots, while the three-engine rescue alighted to become more aware of the situation with the result of being suddenly attacked by enemy fighters. Broke the deadlock, the Italian fighters led by Capt. Pluda attacking enemy pilots provocative and felled two more "Hurricane." The "Sunderland" the pilot recovered and brought on board left undisturbed by Macchi returned to Malta.

In the period of greatest potential recorded in the summer of 1941, Malta's garrison consisted of 30,000 men, 1,400 anti-aircraft guns between medium and heavy, 80 fighter "Hurricane" spread throughout 5 airports with protected shelters or cave, a hundred bombers being 10 organic squadrons, torpedo bombers, reconnaissance aircraft; cave shelters and protected for 10 submarines in the base of the Lazaretto; ammunition for 6 months and 5 months for battery, fuel and food.

It was formed a kind of Home Guard country to report any movement of men or paratroopers along the lines of the Signal Corps Observer England.

Cave shelters for seaplanes were used in the Kalafrana area and the planes penetrated by floating in the interior where they received supplies, repairs and protection from air attacks. The 9th Group CT (Lt. Col. Manlio Minium Paulello) arrived in reinforcement Sicily, consisted of 73rd Sqd. (Capt. M. Pluda), by the 96th (Capt. E. Borghese) and 97th (Capt. A. Larsimont-Pergameni) with a budget of 28 Macchi C.202. He had become familiar with the highly anticipated new fighter since June on the airfield of Lonate Pozzo by formation conscientiously until September when the unit had flown in record time from Gorizia to Ciampino to be presented to Mussolini by Gen. Pricolo the 25th and then moved, with the flights of Naples/Capodichino, up to Comiso.

The activity of the month of October on Malta materialized with the night raids of Valletta, Mikabba, Ta Venice, Hal Far and other objectives, in a daytime bombing mission accomplished on Valletta and in two attacks in low level flight on the airport of Mikabba by fighter with the burning of three airplanes on the ground and others damaged.

Intense and multifaceted also the British air activity who performed 16 raids on Sicily with the bombing, strafing and fragmentation. Suffered damage the airports of Gerbini, Stagnone, Gela, Comiso, Castelvetrano, Catania, Trapani with two aircraft destroyed (1 CR.42, 1 MC.200) and 5 others damaged. The air defense knocked down four bombers, 2 others crashed to collision, a "Blenheim" was captured almost intact for ditching; a good 18 enemy fighters were destroyed in fighter in combat over Malta and the Sicilian sky during interceptions.[384]

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The first fight of Mc.202 in the sky of Malta took place on the first day of October; a formation of 7 fighters under the command of Capt. Pluda escort to a Cant.1007 RST, clashed with 8 "Hurricane" shooting down two among them the commander of the 185th Sqdn. who died in combat.

One Italian aircraft was damaged but though he could return to Sicily.

On October 5, the Air Force/Sicily inaugurated a new fast photographic reconnaissance method, involving a mission to Malta's the first Mc.200 photo, made in order to preserve the crews of the helpless three-engined SM.79/Cant.l007 very often victims, the fighter attacks' opponents. The planimetric pictures machines installed on M.C.200/202 Photographic Reconnaissance were the type Rb.50/75-30 (Cine Avia Robot) in semi-automatic operation, with control switch operated by the pilot.

The targets were sighted exposed and photographed from multiple angles through 90° turns on the axis.

The Macchi photo technically prepared with the assistance of Lt. GARI Vittorio Lana, made use of a planimetric pictures machine set at 7,000 m, which reproduced frames of 40x40 km with the result that a very short time it was possible to obtain an updated picture of the enemy territory in the most important points of the island.

The first photographic mission with MC.200 was made by the Lt. Visconti of the 76th Sqd. CT between the hours 09:30-11:20 of Valletta/Mikabba, escorted by other fighters of the 7th Group CT that waged a short fight with the usual "Hurricane" without suffering major damage.

On October 13, a large formation of MC.200 of 54th Stormo CT attacked by surprise the Mikabba airport at dawn, after coming close to Malta at low altitude to evade radar surveillance. Mikabba airport, home to bombing units, was at that moment assisting some landing bombers, and the Macchis with unusual luck surprised some aircraft on the ground, immediately setting three of them on fire, and machine-gunning others found a bit everywhere in the vast "dispersal area" of the field. Two other bombers were spotted and shot down, while in approaching Malta from Gibraltar.

The surprise made by the 54th showed that the kind of mission - unexpected and fast could it provide excellent results if conducted systematically with adequate strength and with appropriate flight material, these things that at that particular time were missing in the Italian Air Force still lacks a specific operational "Maltese" doctrine encoded in standard form, and sufficient generalizes you theories to exert effective missions of "night fighter assisted" or "chase away", of the type that were already, by British and Germans time with twin-engine “Beaufighter” and "Messerschimitt Bf.110" powerfully armed, operating in Sicily, Libya and South areas of England.

October 17, south of Sicily between fighting a lone Mc.202 and a formation of “Blenheim” escorted by "Hurricane"; enemy planes were able to get the better of the Italian pilot who before falling into the sea, however, could bring down an enemy fighter and was recovered later by an Italian vessel.

The 19th a new confrontation between Mc.202 and enemy aircraft that had made inroads on Comiso and Licata; two enemy planes shot down without any loss from our fighters.

On October 22, the Air Force Command/Sicily was again attacked by flying low on Mikabba entrusting this time the challenging task to the fighters of the 9th Group attacked the enemy airfield in the late afternoon, the time when, according to information gleaned from SIA, were prepared the night attack formations and bombers moved from direct decentralization to collection points set for takeoff.

This time the surprise was less successful as before, and after the strafing of the airfield and decentralization, the Mc.202 clashed with "Hurricane" taken off at the radar signal. In the hard fighting 6 enemy fighters were killed and others effectively machine-gunned without loss. The war report n. 508 extolled the value of the participating pilots and listed the names of the commanders who had participated in the action: Lt. Col. Minium Paluello, Captains Antonio Larsimont-Pergameni and Mario Pluda.[385]

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Fortunately in October they were not to record losses of bomber crews in action even if the planes repeatedly returned damaged by enemy fire, especially in the mission carried out in the afternoon of October 25 against Valletta where two enemy cruisers just arrived, the bombers of the 9th Stormo were escorted by a robust formation of the 9th Group under the command of Col. Eugenio Leotta commander of the 4th Stormo, who wanted to personally take responsibility to protect multi-engine bombers waging battles with "Hurricane" with the result of three shot down.

From the serious battle did not return their own commander Leotta knowingly sacrificed himself in generous attempt to protect the three-engined bombers. It was decorated M.O.v.m. in memory.

The Macchi C.202 had shortened greatly the technological gap with the Hurricane and had re-established an acceptable comparison, the new fighter Macchi, glowing in the moment of the fight, piloted by skilled hands, had expressed with great and decisive importance. But every risky step demanded in consideration of the success the sacrifice of the best.

Interesting was at that time the knowledge of the Italian three-engined attack technique used by British fighters, which came into possession the SIA with the discovery of a confidential report of the 252nd Wing Command (Ref. 252/W.105/OPS) which showed , according to a study by one of the British fighter experts, which identified in the two-one attack methods from surprise and a rear fronted by shooting the three-engine aft -to exploit the dead shooting angles between planes tail and rudder, considering the tendency of Italian planes to keep formation to better defend themselves, aiming at engines and related piping for ease of fire that particularly demonstrating the SM.79.

The report stressed the danger of rear attacks while taking the precautions indicated.

October 23, was taken another night attack on Valletta with Cant.1007 in an attempt to hit the enemy naval force (2 cruisers, 2 DD.) that was reported for several days at anchor in some bays of the Grand Harbour.

The Bomber Command of the Air Force Sicily was strengthened in October by 16th Group BT (Maj. Cesare Toschi) with Sqd. 276th (Capt. F. Pomo) and 277th (Capt. O. Secchi) with BR.20 (16 bimotori) and later by the 55th Group BT (Lt. Col. Renato Di Jorio.); Sqd. 220th/221st under the command respectively of Capt. F. Scaroni and C. Torriani with a budget of 16 BR.20. The entire 37th Stormo now completed in its staff and under the command of Col. Giuseppe Sgarlata, was relocated between Gerbini and Catania on the bases vacated by the 43rd Stormo BT rotated and sent for recovery to Lecce.

In November was recorded a higher number of RAF raids on southern Italy (especially Naples) for remote support for offensive operations started in North Africa with the "Crusader", an operation which was to reject the Axis troops again from the Egyptian border into Sirtica and unlock Tobruk. In Sicily they were recorded during the month 14 raids on various locations on the island: Catania, Messina, Acireale, Gela, Syracuse (1 Cant.506/S destroyed) and on the airports Gerbini and Gela with limited damage. The anti-aircraft artillery knocked down 7 of raiding aircraft and another 5 were destroyed by fighter interceptors, 2 reconnaissance Aviation for the Navy and 2 torpedo bombers during missions in the Sicilian Channel.

The Italian air force proceeded with 10 night bombing missions on Valletta, also attacking the airports of Mikabba, Ta Venice, Hal Far.

Once again the attacks were intended to hit the enemy naval force that had aroused considerable alarm among the commands (Force K) for its high dangerous offensive.

Attacks of Ju.87, BR.20, Cant.1007 Bis followed one another several times on Valletta and were also used bombs of large caliber, but the morning invariably signaled the presence recognition of the enemy ships seemingly unharmed, a clear sign that the night bombing actions did not offer all the guarantees of accuracy and effectiveness of those daytime conducted but in a massive scale and not just isolated bombers.

November 4 at 10:15 starting on the alarm the 16th Group CT to British aircraft reported between Licata and Gela while bombarding towns in the area. Intercepted by the Macchi 200, the twin-engine enemy “Blenheim" and "Wellington", got rid of the bombs trying to reach the open sea.[386]

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A "Wellington" was caught and shot down, plunging into the sea. The crew was rescued later by Italian vessels.

By night mission on November 5, conducted with almost Kamikaze method from 6 Ju.87 101st Group BaT aimed to hit at all costs the ships of Force K located in the bay of French Creek, not returning were two dive bombers culled by the A/A and among them the Stukas of 2nd Lt. Vittorio Bragadin with the gunner S.M. Gatti, both sacrificed to bring the dive bomber to the lowest altitude possible and attempt to hit for sure one of the enemy cruisers. To the memory of the young and brave Officer was granted the M.O.v .m. while his trusty gun also received a decoration for valor for the conscious of sacrifice made. The 7th escorting the Ju.87 bombers of the 101st Group BaT direct on Malta between 11:00/12:35. Poor visibility and a violent shoot-aircraft hindered the mission attended by fighters of the 54th Stormo (7th Group CT) under the command of Capt. Festa.

On the same day the 7th Group received orders to escort a naval division headed to North Africa, with protective missions to start at 10:30 hours of the 8th.

On November 8, it was decided to still make a daytime attack in Grand Harbour with the participation of 4 Cant.1007 with 500 kg bombs, hoping to hit, damage and possibly sinking the two enemy cruisers at anchor identified as "Penelope" and "Aurora". The bomber escort would be provided by the 10th Group Aut. CT that participated with 14 Macchi C.200 with close protection task 18 Macchi C.202 of the 9th Group CT at higher altitude, to counter the usual devious tactic and unexpected of the Maltese "Hurricanes".

It was the first time, at a distance of months, that the two fighter groups – 9th and 10th - traditionally inserted organically into the 4th Stormo CT, participated in a joint war mission while still formally divided and autonomous. The clash with the RAF, as in the mission forecasts, regularly occurred with the financial statements of two knockdowns from both sides and among the Italians, painfully, the killing of the brave Capt. Mario Pluda commander of the 73rd Sqd. and the young officer Luigi Taroni. The 9th a Mc.202 launched on the airport of Hal Far a message with which they were asked about the Capt. Mario Pluda. For the response of the RAF they did have to wait and the day the English aircraft launched near Modica the following message:

"RAF. Your message received and appreciated. A response. Captain Mario Pluda pilot was killed in action. His body was found and buried with full military honors in the cemetery. With regret we have no news of Sergeant Luigi Taroni. Probably he crashed into the sea but it was not possible to find any trace although they have done several searches. RAF/MALTA".

The enemy ships again were fortunately spared and remained free from Italian bombs, sailed the evening of the 8th from the Grand Harbour direct to a deadly rendezvous with a convoy of 7 Italian and German cargo ship, which ran from Messina to Benghazi: the "Duisburg" convoy, sadly passed to the naval history of the Mediterranean because completely destroyed with the further loss of a DD of the escort and damage to two others, despite the presence within easy reach of a superior naval formation in number and power to the Force K. One of the most disastrous and absurd events of the Italian naval warfare.

The arrival of the enemy cruisers at Malta had been reported since 21 October by the Supermarina who had taken appropriate action, blocking the traffic of convoys from Italy and Greece to the Libyan ports and asking Superaereo to neutralize the potential danger .

The 22 Oct. '41 sheet 023902 with directions ftom the Supreme Command, to Supermarina signaled its concern for the sighting and the serious consequences of having to block the traffic with N.A., suggesting in paragraph 5 of the report: "It is essential, for not to run into very serious consequences, that the Air Force makes it impossible for surface ships to stay in Malta."

As already described, Superaereo gave the appropriate steps to Air Force/Sicily Command to intensify raids, trying as much as possible to hit the enemy ships also using, if necessary, daytime attack missions.

Between October 22 and November 8, as long as Force K stayed in Malta, they were carried out 15 bombing missions including three daytime, strafing at low altitude of Mikabba with the loss of two J u.87 and two Mc.202. It was not possible to do more![387]

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The constitution of the convoy "Beta" or "Duisburg" joined with the German steamers "Duisburg" and "San Marco" and the national merchant "Sagitta", "Rina Corrado", "Maria", "Minatitlan" and "Conte di Misurata" it had been decided with motifs of priorities and urgent needs of Supercomando ASI to carry about 35,500 tons of materials (gas, naphtha, ammunition, diesel, 400 vehicles and trailers, various material for genius and artillery) with the escort of DD "Maestrale", "Libeccio", "Oriani", "Fulmine" and the indirect protection - the 3rd Naval Div. (Adm. Bruno Brivonesi) with CA. "Trieste", "Trento" the more powerful than the enemies of the Force K and the DD. "Granatiere," "Bersagliere", "Fuciliere," "Alpino".

On November 5, Gen. Cavallero summoned Gen. S.A. Giuseppe Santoro – deputy Chief of the Air Force G.S. - and informed him all necessary instructions to the convoy "Beta" was assured adequate air escort, while for its part Supermarina, further reinforced the "Beta" with the DDs. "Euro" and "Grecale" to ensure greater defensive ability to direct escort (6 DD, 7 steamers).

To start the 8th (06:30 hours) was activated aerial escort to the convoy departing Naples with the 3rd Div. Naval exiting from Messina, this service, which was carried out in part by the 52nd Stormo CT and in more impressive measure from the 54th Stormo CT, without interruption, until the 16:40, when the incipient darkness did stop monitoring (in the day 58 between CR.42 and MC.200 fighters and 6 Cant.501 played the escort and anti-submarine activities). The Luftwaffe took part in the protection service with 8 Ju.88 and Bf .110.

Ten minutes after the dark sky above the two naval formations, sailing a short distance of each other had been vacated by the Italian and German escort aircraft returned to obscurity, a "Maryland" scout of the 69th Sqdn. recon based at Hal Far, sighted in poor visibility only the "Beta" convoy and gave the alarm in Malta.

In the report of Supermarina prepared on the convoy "Duisburg" was pointed out that at the time of the sighting by the enemy reconnaissance aircraft Italian-German aircraft were still flying escort on ships, but for what concerned the fighters of the 76th Sqd. who were performing the last relay, has to be specified that the escort was halted by darkness at 16:40 with the return to Catania due to the end of the section of Lt. Visconti (duration of the flight 110' at an altitude of 1,000 m.) and probably the aircraft indicated "as still in flight" were German, with greater autonomy as twin-engine and more efficient equipment for night flying (on 8 November the sun set at 17:00).

Almost certainly the "Maryland" was not sighted by escort aircraft for a number of valid reasons: navigation at higher altitude, incipient darkness, control of escort pilots concentrated in the area below; but certainly the enemy plane was seen by ships for the different interpretation optical since: bottom to top, the potential danger, the ease of identification for the vertical surveillance, the contrast of light, and the noise of the engines. The lack of radio R.T. onboard the MC.200 and CR.42 fighter unfortunately prevented the alarm communications and service with escort ships and freighters and aerial escort, even more complicating the situation.

To dispel any doubt on the sighting, a few minutes later the enemy aircraft signaled by radio the discovery to Malta of "Beta convoy" (had not spotted the naval formation stationed behind, a clear sign that the existing poor visibility at the time) while considering objectively the flight altitude alleged at an estimated 3,000 m that would have certainly allowed under normal conditions broader visibility.

From the time of Malta Command informed by "Ultra" of the "Duisburg" convoy immediately went on alert Force K, providing the tracking data and the composition of the convoy.

The maritime aerial organization of Malta sighting was organized under the aegis of the Command and Coastal Command also availed of the local Fleet Air Arm (Naval Aviation) which provided for the service by reconnaissance sections of the Coastal Command (seaplanes "Sunderland" then supplemented by twin-engine "Wellinigton," "Hudson" and "Ventura") and in the specific case of Malta, the "Maryland" of more modest performance in the absence of more suitable for this task aircraft in the Mediterranean at the time of 1941.[388]

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There were already at the end of 1941 on the island, two "Wellington" equipped with ASV and detached to Luqa from the 40th Sqdn., who had the task of patrolling at night the sea area to the east and west of Malta, detect isolated ships or convoys at sea and to provide the coastal command the necessary coordinates indicating the position of the sighted vessel. The daytime patrol service, however, was normally carried out with optical means by "Maryland." The A.S.V. (Airborne Search for Surface Vessel) apparatus, consisted of a radar apparatus for the detection of surface vessels that operated on a wavelength of 1.50 m and allowed to explore a marine surface area of 60-80 square miles, and then supervise in a few hours flight the Sicilian Channel, between the 10° and the 20° meridian by controlling the sea routes from Sicily, Puglia and Greece from the ports of Tripoli and Benghazi with 2,000 km of autonomy that the twin-engine Vickers “Wellington " had, with max speed of 380 km/h (8 hours at cruising speed). The night observation involved the intervention of the FAA Fairey "Swordfish" or RAF "Beaufort" equally with the ASV feature that could make night torpedo launches using radar within a radius of 300 miles from Malta, integrating their attacks bombers increasingly backed by parachute flare aircraft FAA/Malta. Often the sighting, the composition of convoys, escort, the course of action was facilitated by the interception of radio messages transmitted with the "Enigma” and directed to the Libya Naval and the Aegean commands, the X CAT and to the OBS and Flieger Fuhrer Afrika, charged with preparing air-sea escort, appointments on geographical coordinates and other.

It was therefore very difficult to elude aerial surveillance aircraft with ASV posted in the area identified, considering the modest average speed of trains (9 knots = 16 km/h) and the obligatory passage points that had to respect as much as possible the ships to remain night out of range of the torpedo bombers and Malta (250 miles for "Swordfish" - 400 for "Albacore" - 1000 for "Beaufort," "Blenheim", "Wellington") and the route known in advance by the Ultra.

After the sighting of the "Beta" convoy K force departed at 17:30 from the Grand Harbour and headed east for the estimated radar collision course at a speed of 28 knots (52 mph), followed shortly after by a ASV “Wellington “ which was to spot the ships reporting location and composition. But this collaboration was unsuccessful.

At 01:00 on 9 November, the Capt. Agnew commanding Force K, sighted the Italian ships with his RDF radar/Admiralty type 281 of the cruiser "Aurora" (range 30 miles) at a distance of 17,000 meters and 17 minutes later was opened fire from the 152 mm. guns with help of the minimum distance shooting radar of 5,000 meters, sinking one after the other the 7 steamers and the DD “Fulmine”, damaging more or less seriously the “Maestrale”, “Euro” and "Grecale”. Taken by surprise and left without convoy escort, Adm. Brivonesi had no alternative, after a knee-jerk reaction but useless fire of both cruisers "Trento" and "Trieste" which unsuccessfully fired on the distant enemy ships about 300 shots from 203 mm., which reversed course on hold, that the situation is clarified at dawn, while rescuing the survivors, was sunk by the submarine "*Upholder*" also the DD "Libeccio", first severely damaged by a torpedo and then finally lost for the reported damage. Total were saved 717 shipwrecked and the five crewman by a Cant.506/S who had fallen overboard during the rescue operations.

To the tragic events of the "Beta" convoy, Adm. Bruno Brivonesi was referred to a military court, deprived of command until the time when it had been ascertained and judged his possible liability.

Between June and October, the submarines of the 10th Flotilla sank 14 ships for 101,894 TSL. and 6 in November for 30,996 TSL.; another 11 for 57,055 TSL were sunk by the Force K, 4 by planes for 6,046 TSL. In the same period the only the aircraft carried out about 200 anti-ship sorties.

On November 11, the sad events of the convoy "Duisburg" had a dramatic appendix at the Supreme Command, in a meeting in which intervened with the Chief of the G.S.G, Adm. Sansonetti for Supermarina and Gen. Santoro Superaereo along with other high officials, to discuss on new foundations the form, the means and methods that would be needed to overcome the serious problem of supplies for N.A., which urgently needed 30,000 tons of food, 15,000 tons of ammunition, 25,000 tons fuel and other materials for a total of about 100,000 tons.[389]

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The Adm. Sansonetti proposed the increase of the means submarines, a strong increase in air transport, the massive use of surface warships. Superaereo stated that the Air Force/Sicily was not able with the means available to neutralize Malta to the desired level and that was done everything possible, consistent with aircraft and personnel available.

On the 13th the Chief of the G.S.G drew up a summary memo that he gave to the Duce, in which were put in relief the greatest dangers that ran convoys for N.A., the thought of Supermarina about it and the causes which led to the loss of the "Beta" convoy: night attacks with ships equipped with radar, bombers and torpedo planes equipped with ASV, of lurking submarines, these were in order of priority the greatest dangers, while during the day they were more defensive ability from the sky and from the sea and face the potential dangers. It was put forward once again the need to neutralize Malta asking if necessary the intervention of the Luftwaffe, since Germany was equally affected like Italy, and to ensure food supplies for the traffic of N.A.

The Italian ships had to be equipped with radar, with modern technical devices, special ammunition for night shooting.

For the Air Force the Supreme Command - proposed the intensification of the bombing of Valletta and the Malta airport, increased reconnaissance activity, wider participation as escort and anti-submarine protection. Gen. Pricolo proposed to withdraw from Libya a squadron of Dive Bombers (subject to the opinion of Gen. Rommel) and to award to the Air Force/Sicily a share of SM.84 bombers with 2,000 kg. bombs. The Chief of the G.S.G was of the opinion that the action assigned to Air Force/Sicily should have adequate power to obtain the purpose and not "petty action" as had occurred previously.

The development and the details of the action would be discussed separately between Adm. Fioravanzo and Gen. D.A. Umberto Hood, delegate of the Superaereo and taken later knowledge to Adm. Riccardi and Gen. Pricolo. It mattered a lot about the near desired return to Sicily of the Luftwaffe.

After the talks of 25 August in Monaco between Mussolini, Hitler, Cavallero and Keitel to discuss logistical issues and criteria to be adopted in North Africa which included a defensive preparation, strengthening of the aviation and expansion of the Italian -German mechanized units, the Supreme Command arranged to strengthen the Sicilian defenses in the island constituting from scratch the 6th Army (Gen. Ezio Rossi) and the new 7th Army (H.R.H. the Duke of Pistoia) with jurisdiction of the latter from Calabria in Civitavecchia, where it was connected with the 5th Army (Gen. Caracciolo di Feroleto) which defended the central Tyrrhenian coast up to the Po valley.

Were thus taken the necessary measures for the defense of the metropolitan and insular territory, this aspect that until then had been rather neglected in the assumption of a quick war ending with a positive conclusion.

The Fuhrer anticipating Mussolini in a letter sent in October, the news of the imminent transfer- into Italy of the II Flieger Korps and the Duce replied on 3 Nov. '41 informing him of the ongoing work to strengthen Pantelleria and the construction of a runway in Lampedusa, the ongoing program to enhance aviation units in Sicily and Sardelgna on whether to occupy Tunis in case of British attacks. Mussolini thanking Hitler for the planned delivery in November 66,000 tons of fuel oil for the Navy (equal amount was fixed for December) on the strengthening of the X CAT intended to operate in the eastern Mediterranean and in Cyrenaica, provided assurances concerning the reinforcement of the Air Force/Sicily and Libya to better absorb the assigned tasks and ended his letter saying he was certain, that the sending of a new German plane into southern Italy under the command of Field Marshal Kesselring, would have allowed a strong and effective superiority on the opponent, especially for the neutralization of Malta and concluded:

"... I thank you Fuhrer for having ordered Marshal Kesselring who depends directly on the Supreme Command of which I am the head. The High Command is prepared to cooperate with him in the spirit of the most genuine and friendly camaraderie. As for the Italian air force, I am grateful, Fuhrer, had pointed out, with your approval, that the success in this area he recently reported. "

Mussolini[390]

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Despite the serious situation created and took over the crisis in the convoys, it was nevertheless decided to continue at all costs the supply to N.A., by implementing every available resource and every will.

The preparation scheme to schedule a new crossing of fast convoy (14 knots) was set between Supermarina and Superaereo thus:

a) *offensive actions*

(Day X -3)

night bombing in Valletta with the participation of 10 Cant.1007 Bis - 20 BR.20 - 4 SM.84 = 34 aircraft.

Bombs of 250/500/1,000 kg = 51,000 kg.

fragmentation/strafing airfields.

6 Re.2000- 6 MC.200.

daytime precision Bombing of Valletta - 15 Ju.87 with 7,500 kg of bombs and 500 kg. photographic survey of Malta.

(Day X -2)

night bombing the airfields -10 Cant.1007 Bis -15 BR.20 == 25 aircraft.

35,100 kg bombs 50/100 kg.

(Day X -1)

night bombing the airfields 10Cant.1007 Bis -10 BR.20 = 20 aircraft.

Bombs from 25,000 kg 15/50 kg. fragmentation / strafing the airfields -6Re.2000 -10 MC.200.

offensive actions against any naval units in navigation with Ju.87.

any shares of torpedo bombers -only in case of naval units at sea sighting (a sub-unit in Libya in Castel Benito). Recognition between the parallel 35° 50'/37° 40' - Meridiani 15° 30'/17° 30'.

direct protection to convoys

Day X

Escort fighter against high altitude reconnaissance aircraft from sunrise to sunset (12 hours of light) with 12 paired fighters (CR.42/MC.200) average length 120'.

long-range escort with Ju.88/Bf.110.

fighter escort anti-torpedo bomber (last round of light).

Day X +1

fighter escort against reconnaissance/torpedo planes with different densities (12 paired fighters CR.42/MC.200). long-range escort with Ju.88/Bf.110. anti-submarine escort with Cant.501/506. strategic basis with SM.79 and CR.25 (possible Bf.110). Anti-insidious basis with aircraft of Marilibia/West Sector Air Force. Naval formation escort. Malta photographic reconnaissance. Reconnaissance fighter Valletta (50 miles from the port).

Day X +2

direct fighter escort (West Sector Air Force/Air Force Sicily which take off from Pantelleria). anti-submarine escort with Cant. 501/506 Marilibia. Anti-insidious escort with SM. 79/Ju.88 Fl.Fu. Afrika until the arrival of the convoy. reconnaissance parallel 35° 30'/37° 30'. Naval formation escort from 13:30 till evening (share of fighters located in Misrata). Recon sector between 12°/16° meridian (180/200 miles from the port of La Valletta). photographic survey of Malta. afternoon reconnaissance from 80°/95° with Marilibia aircraft. Reconnaissance 20° meridian east and between 95°/120° Fighter Air Force/Sicily with 4 pairs and landing at Castel Benito. Reconnaissance fighter until 17:30 in the sector between 120°/150° from La Valletta (60 miles east from the port) 36° parallel/16° meridian (Air Force/Sicily). Reconnaissance fighter till 17:30 hours between 290°/320° (40 miles west of the port). Survey area between joining Cape Bon and Marsala (98 miles) from Marisicilia with R.M. flying boats

D +3

Reconnaissance to the east 20° meridian (Air Force/Aegean -X CAT). Reconnaissance views of Valletta. Reconnaissance field 200°/255° of 50/120 miles from Marsaxlokk (starting at 07:00) Air Force/Sicily. Reconnaissance zones 35° 20'/14° 30' and 33° 10'/ 17 ° 30' (Air Force/Libya -Aeronautica/Sicily). Reconnaissance 17:30 hours fighter area 40 miles West of Malta - 290°/320°.[391]

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Reconnaissance joining Cape Bon/Marsala between parallel of Kuriat and meridian 13° 10' until sunset (18:00) by Marinavia/Sicily with flying boats of the R.M.

It follows from all these, operational details you can have a fairly complete picture of the tasks that the Air Force had to fulfill (Sicily-Aerolibia-Marinavia) to provide appropriate assistance to the Navy and to ensure the maximum safety limits for convoys to Libya.

It was a commitment that absorbed hundreds of aircraft and mission, a grueling routine that for at least two shifts per day (4 hours) to attract all physical energy and determined pilots, with all the aggravating circumstances of the flight over the sea in the event of ditching, with the return to the base in Sicily (or Libya if closer to the convoy position).

* * *

Force K in the return phase in Malta after the destruction of the convoy "Duisburg" was attacked several times by torpedo bombers of the 278th and 282nd Sqd. but without appreciable results except of killing two enemy fighters sent from Malta to protect ships, attacked and destroyed by Macchi C.202 of the 9th Group CT sent as escort to the SM.84/SM.79.

Anther 3 "Hurricanes" were shot down the day after the attack the base of Gela; one hit from a defense batteries of the airfield and the other two attacked after fast-tracking of a "Folgore" of the 9th Group and crashed into the sea with short bursts of machine guns.

On November 20 escort a new convoy escorted to N.A. by the 3rd Naval Div. (Adm. Angelo Parona) convoy in the day of the 21st was spotted by aerial reconnaissance and reported to Malta. Took part the aircraft of the 54th Stormo CT, 23rd Group and SM.79 of the 10th Stormo BT. Altogether they were at sea 4 motor ships including an oil tanker, 5 cruisers (two of the 8th Naval Div. -Adm. Giuseppe Lombardi), 16 DD. squadrons 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th which were arranged in the front and rear of the convoy.

British airplanes not lost sight of for a moment the Italian ships - by day and night. - They were torpedoed a short distance from Messina and damaged by submarines and aircraft, the cruisers "Trieste" and "Duca degli Abruzzi" by "Swordfish" and “Albacore" of Sqdns. 828th/ 830th FAA) and then, the torpedoing of "Abruzzi” had occurred at 00:38 hours on 21 November, it was clear that the attack was, it was carried out with the use of ASV while at high altitude bombers attacked the merchant using parachute flare aircraft without damaging them, another sign of this obvious the technical difficulties present in nightly bombings in the horizontal dimension.

November 19, died on takeoff with his BR.20 loaded with bombs for a night mission on Malta, Maj. Cesare Toschi commander of the 116th Group BT (37th Stormo) crashed at sea for cut-out engines.

For his past as a brave fighter on many fronts of war he was assigned to his memory the M.O.v.m.

On November 24 were lost German merchant ships "Procida", and “Maritza" loaded with fuel, aerial bombs and armored vehicles started from Piraeus with the escort of two Italian TB. “Lupo" and "Cassiopeia" and sailing in broad daylight with the protection of aircraft of X CAT.

The convoy departing for some time under radio monitoring by ULTRA, was reported by British informers in Alexandria at the time that left the port and the M.F. instructed the Force K of Malta to intercept the route to Benghazi.

The attack took place in the early afternoon of the 24th despite the presence of two German aircraft and with the courageous intervention of the torpedo boats escort who also hit with shrapnel the British cruisers.

The two merchant ships were sunk and very serious was judged the failure of the X CAT present in the area, which strangely did not attack British ships, perhaps because as a surprise.

In November, it was recorded the highest index sinking of direct merchant ships to Libyan ports.

Between June 1940 and May 1941 were lost 30 merchant ships for 109,000 TSL, while from June to November 1941 were lost 66 ships for 330,675 GRT (17 for 65,679 GRT for action of surface ships) and the rest mainly from submarines and aircraft .

The range of the torpedo-bombers of Malta had been expanded by 90 miles from the Spring of 1940 to 160 miles of the 2nd half of 1941. The percentage of losses in convoys went up gradually from 7% in July, to 25% in August, to 40% in September and arrived at 63% in November. [392]

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At the end of 1941 the OKL sent to Sicily a new Air Corps, the II of Lt-Gen. Loerzer - to resume the air offensive on Malta. German airmen posing in group just arrived in Italy from the Russian front.

This Index is the highest ever recorded for the whole course of the 1940-43 conflict.

Particularly serious was the loss of the tanker “Mantovani” carrying of more than 8000 tons of fuel, which started on November 30 from Trapani to Tripoli with the escort of three destroyers and adequate number of aircraft for direct and indirect protection. Spotted by scouts of Malta on December 10th, the enemy aircraft constantly stayed in sight of the ship, despite the intervention of 2 fighters of the escort and a SM.79 for supporting a Cant.501 in anti-submarine service.

At 13:00 the “Mantovani” was attacked by two "Blenheim" and damaged without fire. An attempt to tow her by the DD “Da Mosto" failed and during the void determined by the return of the penultimate escort patrol at end of autonomy and lack of visibility (16:50 hours), 4 enemy bombers attacked the tanker furiously, eventually sink it while the "Da Mosto" also attacked, was sunk later by the Force K sailing from Malta, who had been spotted and "strafed" by 3 CR.42 who had advised amongst other things the Italian ship of the danger she was running.

The courageous behavior of the DD. “Da Mosto", whose commander was awarded M.O.v.m., rendered immobile by the shooting of the British cruisers and about to sink, was appreciated by the enemy who with sailed by with the DD. “Lively” rendering military honors with the crew lined up at attention.

Admittedly Supermarina, the "battle of the convoys”, initially established with very small losses and the overall situation under control, then took a negative rhythm that got worse from month to month and ever increasing losses, recorded statistically as departure from the Sicilian bases of X CAT and as a result of decreased air pressure on Malta.

The vessel leakage very small until May to June, resulted bearable in July-August but became serious between September to November, in excess to each tolerable limit when touched in some cases 70% of the transported materials: a percentage never recorded before then and never reached again throughout the course of the war.

On 30 November, the 76th Sqd. CT was asked to provide the escort to the royal tri-motor I-ESTO carrying King Vittorio Emanuele III for a inspection visit to Sicily.

The escort with Macchi 200 was held from Reggio Calabria to Catania from 11:00 to 12:45 and at an altitude of 1500 m and was repeated on December 2nd from Comiso up to Reggio Calabria for 90' at an altitude of 1000 m at abeam area of expertise, the 21st Group CT arranged to detect the Air-Sicily escort accompanying the SM.83 until landing in Centocelle. During the month had been completed the arrangement of the cameras even on Macchi C.202 of the 9th Group CT, and had Superaereo now have a valuable tool of investigation and control in strategic reconnaissance. On November 23, the start of the “Crusader” in North Africa determined the transfer to Libya of the 96th and 97th Sqd. under the command of Capt. Larsimont- Pergameni, while remaining in Sicily the 73rd with some of his "Folgore" changed in the role of RF (Fighter Recon).

From June to November the two Groups of the 4th Stormo operating off Malta had lost in action a commander of the Stormo, a group commander and two squadron commanders, officers and six noncommissioned officers-five pilots to demonstrate tangibly the spirit of sacrifice and self-denial that animated all the components of the prestigious units.[393]

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The most important event recorded at the end of November, it was announced the arrival of other units of the Luftwaffe in Sicily, an aspect which assumed at that particular period of great importance and strategic importance, both for the Italian command, clearly unable to resolve using only the power of the Regia Aeronautica the onerous Maltese problem, both for the OKW that it was rightly concerned about the negative turn that had taken the events in North Africa and in the Mediterranean.

The G.U.A. that the Luftwaffe destined to Sicily was the 2nd Flieger Korps (Gen. Bruno Loerzer).

In November Malta's air power increased further in fighters and bombers (in 1941 alone 244 «Hurricane» arrived in Malta) and the air situation on the island was examined by Air Marshall Basil Embry - Inspector General of the RAF who had service talks with Air Marshall Coningham and Hugh P. Lloyd - commander of RAF Malta to increase the offensive potential of the island for future war operations, suggesting among other things the opportunity to gradually replace the outdated «Hurricane» with the «Spitfire» to better counter the effectiveness of the new German Bf.109/F, to carry out attacks on Sicily on an ever-increasing scale using the greater autonomy and the higher war characteristics of the Supermarine fighters. It was therefore decided to send «Spitfire» units to Malta as soon as possible.

The succession of fighter dispatches in 1941 by aircraft carriers began on March 2 with the launch of 6 Hurricanes and continued regularly with the arrival of 109 Hurricanes throughout June and the transit of another 115 bound for Egypt.

A serious loss occurred with the sinking of the freighter "Parracombe" which was carrying 21 "Hurricane" is lost on mines near Cape Bon. Another difficult problem concerned the quality of envoys judged reinforcing pilots ware less experienced, and was required to cooperate fully with the expert pilots of the 249th Sqdn. to improve their professional quality and strengthen the 261st Sqdn. helping besides the formation of the 185th. Instead improvements were detected either in the organization of the fighter command, infrastructure and technical and radio equipment.

In the first four months of 1941 it had been confirmed the destruction of 60 German planes and 16 Italian and destruction on the others at Sicilian airports 12 airplanes between Italian and German. The RAF Malta had lost in combat 42 fighter and another 36 were lost on the ground, and for various reasons.

The last dispatch of planes came in November with the "Ark Royal" which launched 44 Hurricane and 7 Blenheim before being sunk by the U.81. Were killed 56 officers and 806 sailors. There was 450 survivors including Adm. Pridham-Wippel.

The last month of 1941 was characterized by a decrease in offensive missions to Malta carried out by bombers from Sicily, offset by an increase of German aviation actions started on December 20, with a bombardment of Valletta and continue until 30 December with a total of 5 missions undertaken in 10 days against 16 made by the RA during the month.

On 3 December fell into the sea as a result of being shot down, the personnel service aircraft with Gen. Ritter von Pohl on board who had departed Sicily to Libya, was saved with other members of the crew the next day while he was drifting on a life raft.

On December 4 night action strafing by part the fighters of the 23rd Group CT on Hal Far fields and Gudja also equipped with wing bombs. The RAF was active enough in Sicily with eight missions to different locations and on the island airports of Catania and Comiso that had caused the destruction of a MC.200 and damage to another 3.

The enemy offensive activity was, however, paid with the loss of 20 between bombers and fighters (loosing 2 by ships, two by anti-aircraft artillery, 2 by sea scouts, 4 torpedo planes, one captured intact after being intercepted by German fighters, 9 shot down by our fighters over Malta and Sicily).

On December 5, during a risky reconnaissance mission died the brave and young 2nd Lt. Gabriele Ferretti of the 86th fighter Sqd. (54th Stormo/7th Group CT) crashed with his Macchi during a high altitude flight.

To his memory he was assigned the M.O.v.m.

On December 10, the Air Force/Sicily Command, following a GS/RA dispatch, lost the 23rd CT Aut. Group, which had to be urgently transferred to Libya, with the exception of the 377th Sqdn., which, having become autonomous, moved to Trapani/Milo under the command of Lieutenant Giuseppe David.

December 2, the pilots of the 54th Stormo CT were called to one of the usual naval escort missions leaving from Reggio Calabria to Catania, with flights of about two hours at an altitude of 1,000 m for anti-submarine control, while the 23rd Group CT operated between Trapani/Milo, Pantelleria, Gela, again for naval protection missions.[394]

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On the 11th a pair of CR.42 in escort mission shot down a "Blenheim" and later a second pair attacked a patrol of "Wellington" shooting it down against the loss of Sgt. Diego Fiorentini of the 75th Sqd. hit by the twin-engine's dorsal turret and crashed into the sea.

The same day a group of 7th Group CT pilots transferred to Castel Benito numerous CR.42 left at Pantelleria by the 23rd Group CT short of pilots, staying in Libya until the 14th engaged in the next fighter transfer from Castel Benito/Mellaha to Misrata, Wadi Tamet. To start from the 18th by the 54th Stormo CT began gradually passing on Macchi C.202 on the airfield of Comiso with the collaboration of 73rd Sqd. pilots, and a few days later the pilots of the 7th Group CT began the photographic reconnaissance missions\Malta after having taken over the 6 Macchi 202 RF ceded from the 9th Group CT whose pilots of the 73rd remaining in Sicily had been ordered to move to the Veneto to rearm and move to N.A. in other squadrons of the unit. 10th Group Aut. CT had meanwhile moved to Udine/Campoformido for reconstitution and transition to "Folgore" and 37th Stormo BT was also alternated. The Air Force/Sicily deployment at the end of 1941 was as follows:

Bombing command - Trapani
9th Stormo BT -Chinisia.
29th/33rd Group - Castelvetrano/Trapani (26 Cant. 1007 Bis).
10th Stormo BT - Palermo.
30th/32nd Group - Castelvetrano/Palermo (32 MS. 79).
101st Group Ba.T - Trapani (16 J u.87) awaiting transfer.
282nd Sqd. AS - Catania (4 SM.84).

Fighter command – Comiso
171st Group Aut. CN - Gela (16 CR.42) pending dissolution.
54th Stormo CT - Comiso.
16th Group - Castelvetrano (167th Sqd. Comiso) (35 CR.42/MC.200/MC.202).
7th Group - Catania (86th Sqd. Comiso) (38 CR.42/MC.200/MC.202).
Sec. CN -Catania- Trapani-Palermo-Comi.

Autonomous units
173rd Sqd. RST -Palermo (8 CR.25).
278th Sqd. AS - Pantelleria (Core) (9 SM.79).
612th Sqd. S. - Stagnone (8 Cant.506/S).

A total of 200 aircraft including 90 bombers and many fighters, some twenty reconnaissance and transport aircraft excluding aircraft of the O.A. and R.M.

Changes had also been received in the RAF/Malta line who had replaced the bomber 82nd, 105th and 38th Squadrons and Sqdns. 40th, 21st, 104th and 113th gone home with "Blenheim"/"Wellington".

Unchanged sorting of other fighter units, reconnaissance, torpedoing, rescue located in the island.

Overall it was found to be present on the island of Malta bases least 350 aircraft including bombers (30%), fighters (60%), reconnaissance/torpedo planes (10%). It was an air power greater numerical strength than Italian aviation in Sicily, with the best technical and operational quality features, more refined organization, more efficient and rational use doctrines. These aspects it is good to keep in mind when *a posteriori* evaluating the work the Air Force of Sicily during the multi-year battle to neutralize Malta.

The balance of power between R.A. and R.A.F. had long been altered in favor of English aviation and was essential to restore balance to not irreparably compromise the strategic situation in the Mediterranean.

In December, as mentioned, the Italian aviation activity was reduced and perform essentially a function defensive departures of alarm and to view and photographic reconnaissance of Malta, interception of enemy aircraft, escorts to convoys, patrols, some night bombing missions.

A fight over Malta took place on the 22nd between a Mc.202/RF and some "Hurricane" who had tried to intercept it at an altitude of 7,000 m. But the Italian fighter disengaged brilliantly after hitting in several places an enemy aircraft seen moving away with smoke on board.[395]

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But to rebalance the strategic situation in the Mediterranean in November and December, there were some important events of which were German submariners protagonists and Italian sailors of the assault craft, which hit and seriously impair the potential and the pride of the Royal Navy.

We follow chronologically these war stories of the sea.

On November 11, the CV "Ark Royal", positively realized operation “Perpetual” launching at 180 miles from Malta (about 300 km) 37 “Hurricane” and 7 “Blenheim” destined to reinforce the island's air force. Then reversed the route to the west. The 13th in return to Gibraltar and a short distance from the fortress, the "Ark Royal" was torpedoed and sunk by the submarine U.81 (Lt. Guggenberger) leaving the Mediterranean Fleet completely devoid of aircraft carriers.

On November 25 it was also lost in Egyptian waters the B.B. "Barham” sank returning from an indirect support to Task Force K, sent to carry out the attack on the "Maritza” convoy then destroyed. Hit by torpedoes launched from U.331 (Lt. von Tiesenhausen) the battleship exploded and quickly sank with the loss of 861 sailors.

It was a serious blow to the Royal Navy that abundantly repaid the Axis of heavy losses in the Mediterranean by the British ships.

Still a loss for the Mediterranean Fleet on December 15, when the U.557 (Lt. Paulhsen) sank, the cruiser "Galatea” but tragically was rammed and sunk by mistake the next day by the torpedo boat "Orione” unaware of presence in the area of a German submarine.

Then followed the attack of the 19th by X MAS in Alexandria, whose action, boldly conducted by a few brave sailors, deserves more discussion.

THE LUFTWAFFE RETURNS TO SICILY
(O.B.S. - Oberbefehlshabersud -)

After the transfer in the summer of X Flieger Korps to Greece at the bases of Eleusis (KG.26), Heraklion and Maleme (LG.1), Rethimo and Tatoi (ZG.26) where they settled the battle and fighting groups of the X CAT which also had to transport groups of Ju.52 (TG.1) and two squadrons of strategic reconnaissance (F.123 Gr.), could continue to operate even if deprived of Stuka wings sent to Russia , it now has an adequate number of bombers/torpedo planes He.111, Ju.88, Bf.110.

The Kriegsmarine which had deployed in the Mediterranean a strong group of submarines, supplemented later by torpedo boats and minesweepers and captured from the Greek military ships, provided for his needs of a maritime reconnaissance group and rescue at sea with planes of the type He.60, Ar .196, Do.24. Even a four-engine FW.200 unit was available in the eastern Mediterranean for special transportation needs.

With the organic insertion of the X Flieger Korps into the Luftflotte 2, there was an increase of units to add to Fl.Kps II namely: a new sqdn. of strategic reconnaissance 2/(F) 123rd Gr.Fa., the completion of LehrGeschwader JG.1 increased to 4 organic groups and KG.26 rose by a group of about seventy Ju.88 and He.111 in more as it was also enhanced the tactical component of Fl.Fu. Afrika with the expansion of the workforce in the award of III/LG.1 of Ju.88, and the strengthening of the Stukas of I/St.G.1, II/St.iG.2, I/St .G.3, the increase with the fighter of the II/III/JG.27 and 3/NJG.2, as well as occasional shares of III/JG.53, transferred from Sicily from time to time, and finally a sqdn. III/ZG.26 for the destroyer specialty with Bf.110.

About a thousand aircraft were in service at the end of 1941 in the two organic Air Fleets ready to substantially change the strategic situation in the Mediterranean in the intentions of the Fuhrer. A first operation of aircraft and the Luftwaffe staff (14 Bf.110 and 7 He.111) had already had in May in Iraq in support of military operations started with the revolt of Rashid Ali and such support continued again for June, until such time as the survivors Franco-German aircraft left Iraq returning in the bases of the eastern Mediterranean.

The rapidly deteriorating in the Mediterranean strategic situation with the impressive increase of sunken ships, the heavy losses of war materials and Italian-German personnel, the impossibility for the Italian Air Force to unilaterally solve the problem to neutralize Malta, they were the fundamental reasons that advised the OKW and the Supreme Command to radically review the situation and find an appropriate remedy.[396]

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Deployment of Mc. 200 of the 98th Sqd. (Capt. S Goslini) 7th Group / 54th Stormo CT. On several occasions the Macchi fighters had to fight against the Hurricane on the island of Malta during missions or to counter enemy attacks.

Pilots of the 23rd Group CT. (Maj Tito Falconi) that played a notable role during the attack cycle of Malta making brilliant actions, achieving excellent results due to the value and sacrifice of many pilots.

The OKW General officer at the Italian Supreme Command - Enno von Rintelen - had faithfully reported the worsening of the Italian situation in the Mediterranean to the Fuhrer, asking urgently, in the interests of the Reich, the assignment of a new Flieger Korps to be allocated to Sicily and also Adm. Weichold, the representative in Italy of the War Navy of the Reich (Deutschen Kriegsmarine), had joined in the requests for reinforcements, saying that the Navy was unable to ensure adequate defense of the traffic with Libya.

The OKW although seriously engaged on the Eastern Front, studied the situation in the Mediterranean and decided to strengthen the Axis defensive organization with submarines, motor torpedo boats and other auxiliary vessels, anticipating among other things to the Supreme Command, that new units of the Luftwaffe would be sent to Sicily as soon as the winter would significantly slowed the flight operations on the eastern front, making combat groups available for further uses war such as, Stukas and destroyers.

The increase in the number of U-Boats in the Mediterranean - moved rapidly from 16 to 20 –and the first sensational success by the Kriegsmarine, behaved increased aerial surveillance of the RAF in Gibraltar with the arrival of the 233rd and 502nd squadrons of Coastal Command with Hudson", "Whitley" and "Wellington" with ASV, reinforcing the existing 10th Sqdn. with "Sunderland" of Coastal Command and 812th of "Swordfish" of F.A.A., formally embarked on the lost CV "Ark Royal".

The strategic and military situation despite the great and victorious achievements of 1941 became more and more serious always for Axis and Malta always ended up to turn out as the linchpin of the enemy. Also new to the offensive that began in November in Libya the British 8th Army, the situation would be even worse if they had not occurred in the meantime some exceptional events: for the loss of the "Ark Royal" and the "Barham", the Japanese declaration of the war on the United States and Britain, the sinking of BB "Queen Elizabeth" and "Valiant", sending substantial British naval forces from the Middle East into the Indian Ocean, arriving in Sicily of the II Flieger Korps; a series of decisive events turned upside down or had to flip over time clearly the strategic situation in favor of the Axis while still leaving the desert of Libya, the tactical initiative to the British. In December, there were other worrisome loss of merchant and military ships, due to the reactive capacity of tiny Malta.

The 13th CL. "Da Barbiano" and "Da Giussano" departed from Palermo the decks loaded with oil drums to be transported to Tripoli, were seen at night from the usual nocturnal reconnaissance planes equipped with ASV posted on the route established by a message from O.I.C. and from ULTRA attacked by 4 enemy DDs directed to Malta diverted early on passing zone and set fire to the two fast cruisers causing their sinking. An absurd order that the illogical use of two beautiful ships had tragically exacerbated. The same night the MN. "Filzi" and "Del Greco" sailing on the South course to N.A., were sunk in the Gulf of Taranto by the Sub. "Upright".

It was necessary to make good out of the Naval Battle Fleet to ensure the sending to Libya a modest convoy of four merchant ships at great risk to the Naval Forces Battle Fleet, uneconomic waste of fuel oil and a significant deployment of Italian and German aircraft required for air cover. Yet on this occasion that presented serious risks to the enemy, the British did not hesitate to take to the sea with the Force K (2 cruisers and 6 DD.) knowing that it would be facing 4 BB, 5 cruisers, 13 Fleet DD and 6 escort DD. under the command to Adm. Angelo Jachino. But they also knew that it was a calculated risk that also had its positive aspects in night fighting.

The Mediterranean Fleet sent from Alexandria to Malta a group of reinforcement composed with 3 cruisers and 8 DD. escorting a tanker directed to Malta.

On December 17, the two naval formations were in contact in the Gulf of Sirte, but the shooting appeared at a great distance, for a very short time and with no particular results, with the exception of the cruiser "Neptune" sunk in the night after having stumbled upon an Italian minefield together with the DD "Kandahar". Other British ships suffered more or less serious damage.[397]

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After so much bitterness and disappointments on December 19, 1941 also the Italian Navy had dutifully revenge and its fair share of glory and satisfaction, which eventually repaid commanders and sailors of the crew of unconditionally offered sacrifices, selflessness demonstrated in service anywhere, the serious losses suffered in combat.

A handful of brave sailors of the X Flotilla MAS (Lt. Durand de La Penne; Chief. G.N. Vincenzo Martellotta, Chief. G.N. Antonio Marceglia, Chief. Diver Emilio Branchi, Mario Marino, Spartaco Schergat) piloting S.L.C. type of explosive ordnance (Slow Moving Torpedo) penetrated in the military port of Alexandria after being transported to the area by the submarine "Scire" (Cmdr. Junio Valerio Borghese) and managed to sink the B.B. "Queen Elizabeth" (Cunningham's Flagship) and "Valiant" and the tanker "Sagona."

It was a great loss to the British Navy deprived in just over a month of three battleships, an aircraft carrier, a cruiser, three DD. by Axis and mostly by German submarines and Italian assault craft. The advent and success of Italian sailors suddenly overturned in favor of the Axis the strategic situation in the Mediterranean and created favorable conditions for a new, bold and promising war policy.

But unfortunately neither the Supreme Command nor the Supermarina knew or wanted to change the extreme defensive prudence concepts established and ingrained since the clash of Cape Matapan, by undertaking initiatives to further expand the scope of success. It was lost in this way, once again, another favorable opportunity to radically change the situation in the Mediterranean. To the enemy battleships lost in November and December were as yet add the "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse" sunk on December 10 by Japanese planes in the Far East.

That remained at the end of 1941 the powerful and feared Mediterranean Fleet of Cunningham, was reduced to 3 light cruisers and a dozen DD. so low as to preclude any kind of offensive action at any point of the Mediterranean, including Malta.

The arrival in Italy of the Command and its GS (Stabs) of Luftflotte 2 (Field Marshal Albert Kesselring) back from Russia together with the II Flieger Korps (Gen. Bruno Loerzer), improved even more operationally favorable strategic situation that had created for the axis.

The 2nd Luftflotte Command was located first in Rome, then he moved to Frascati at the Villa Aldobrandini, while an Advanced Tactical Command was established in Sicily - at Taormina - after the full allocation of the Luftwaffe of the airports of Catania, Gerbini, Gela, S. Pietro di Caltagirone, Sciacca, Trapani, Comiso, Reggio Calabria, and also the partial utilization of Castelvetrano airports and Cagliari/Elmas and two logistics airfields in southern Italy allocated for repairs and maintenance of the German aircraft (Bari and Brindisi) and a new airport depots (Luftpark) Naples/Capodichino. Because the command of the 2nd Luftflotte normally provided for a higher organic entity to an Air Corps, the OKW gathered in a special control body called Oberbefehlshaber South (O.B.S.) entrusting to Marshal Kesselring all the G.U.A. located in the Mediterranean (X and II Flieger Korps) and Flieger Fuhrer Afrika, was left, only for tactical use, assigned to General Rommel with his Panzergruppe "Afrika", and also to include the units of Flak and units of the Wehrmacht, including the Kriegsmarine Mittel Meer for certain general guidelines and DAK itself as part of a wider strategic and unified operating concept, while remaining employed by the latter under the direct command of Gen. Erwin Rommel for appearance tactical.

Marshal Kesselring was then conferred from the OKW the post of "German Commander Superiore" for the South.

Special directives of the Fuhrer for the Luftflotte 2, were assigned to Marshal Kesselring at H.Q. the Fuhrer and specifically contemplated: "Threaten the enemy air and naval forces from southern Italy and North Africa, ensure communications with Libya, paralyzing the enemy traffic in the Mediterranean, prevent supplies of Malta and Tobruk, neutralize Malta urgently to reach their goals."

The hierarchically Marshal Kesselring remained subject not only to the OKW and his direct superior of the Reich Marshal Hermann Goering, Mussolini directly as Supreme Commander of the Italian Armed Forces and through intermediaries, by General Cavallero, delegated by the Duce to the discussion of the military problems at the Supreme Command.[398]

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The agreed minutes between Italy and Germany for Joint Action coordination between O.B.S. and the Armed Forces Italian, after contrast, attributions, subdivisions and skills definitions, as of November 5 it found to be defined as follows:

1) The CAT II is stationed in Sicily along with a share of the Italian Air Force that will pass to the orders of the II CAT Command;

2) When operational requirements related to aerial-naval cooperation require it to transfer from Sicily of the airfields in other areas Germanic air units, these will move employed by the Italian Air Command, unless otherwise agreed on a case by case basis;

3) Between the O.B.S. and the Supreme Command and the general lines of action will be determined to be conducted to the fight in the Mediterranean basin; these lines will be updated every time that the situation had to ask for it. The conclusions will be submitted to the Duce;

4) On the basis of these lines will be determined above, of an agreement between OBS and the Chief of the Air Force SIM, the division of tasks between Luftflotte and Italian Air Force and those of their normal areas of action.

These conclusions will be communicated to the Supreme Command to be sanctioned by the Duce;

5) Coordination of actions between German and Italian air forces will be by direct agreement between OBS and the Chief of the Air Force GS, keeping the Supreme Command informed;

6) Will be set up at the OBS a mixed Aeronautical General Staff; Superaereo remains at the core of the existing Germanic G.S.;

7) With regard to aerial-naval cooperation in general, the guidelines will be established by the Supreme Command taking orders from the Duce, with OBS collaboration, Chief G.S. of the Navy and the Air Force Chief of Staff. The same will happen every time is particularly important in view of air and naval operations;

8) For cooperation between their naval surface vessels and Italian and German dive bombers, they remain in place the existing agreements between Supermarina and German Navy Command in Rome, already approved by the Supreme Command;

9) if it occurs the opportunity of a particular collaboration of Luftflotte with the Forces High Command of N.A., the terms of this collaboration will be defined in agreement with the OBS, the Supreme Command, who took orders from the Duce will examine the implementing regulations.

The command structure of the 2nd Luftflotte whose Chief of Staff was Colonel Klaus Ube, was articulated in the operational Staff in Sicily (Chief of G.S. Gbls. Hans Seidmann), the Office of connection with the Supreme Command governed by Gen. Wenninger with dependent services.

As an official of X CAT connection to the Air Force/Aegean Command was appointed Maj. Rudolf Rossbacher.

What official OKW liaison with the Ministry of War were designees Maj. F. Gericke and W. Kock.

To command of 2nd Luftflotte was assigned Kriegs Berichter 7th PK. Kp. (7th Co. Propaganda) with war photographers and reporters and was published weekly "Adler im Suden" (the Eagles in the South).

As the official link between the Italian Superaereo and the OBS was appointed Gen. B.A. Venceslao D'Aurelio.

The II Flieger Korps, restored to Sicily, had as Chief of Staff Obs. Paul Deichmann, and X Flieger Korps (Gen. H. Geisler replaced shortly after by Gen. Lt. H. von Waldau) had as Chief of Staff the Obs. Martin Harlingausen.

The structure of the German II Flieger Korps was as follows:

122nd Group of Strategic Reconnaissance (Fernaufklaren) with Ju.88;

I/KG.54, K.Gr.606, K.Gr.806 with twin-engine Ju.88 (Bombardment).

II-III/KG.77 with bombers Ju.88 (Bombardment);

I-II-III/JG.53 with aircraft Bf.109 (fighter); II/JG.3 with aircraft Bf.109 (fighter);

8/ZG.26 with twin-engine Bf.110 (Heavy fighter); I/NJG.2 with Ju.88 (heavy night fighter); I/St.G.1 with Stukas Ju.87 (Dive Bombers).

As a central tactic-operative was formed the Flieger Fuhrer Sicily under the command of Col. A. Roth based in Catania, while the Command of II Flieger Korps settled in Mesisina. [399]

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Overall Fl.Kps II fielded about 400 aircraft of the 1st line, including new versions of the twin-engine Ju.88 (A4-A7), the Messerschmitt Bf.109 version Fritz equipped with more powerful engine and improved technical performance and the first Ju.88 night fighter with pilots trained to work in partnership with Funkmess Freya and Wurzburg (radar sighting and accuracy).

While German units began to arrive in Sicily, settling on assigned airports and using besides the existing technical and logistical organization and efficient infrastructure maintained from the start for the Greeks! In the X Flieger Korps, Marshal Kesselring began to exercise his control action in the dual role as the OBS and Luftflotte 2 commander.

The start of this control action gave notice Gen. Cavallero to Supercomando N.A. (for Gen. Bastico) and to Gen. Fougier for Superaereo with Directive D. 31042/OP 3 Dec. 1941 well Synthesized:

On 1 December, Field Marshal Kesselring, Commander of the 2nd Luftflotte, assumed command of the X CAT, pending the arrival of the II CAT in full force in Sicily. The Field Marshal gave the X CAT the following orders:

1) The X CAT will have to prevent the concentration of enemy forces and, through continuous attacks, an orderly retreat of enemy forces on the southern front. It is necessary to exploit all existing possibilities to fight enemy aviation. These tasks must be carried out in direct agreement with the Italian air forces which will receive relevant directives.

2) Equally important task is to isolate Tobruk. Agreements will be taken from the 2nd Luftflotte and Superaereo prior agreements with Commander X CAT.

3) It once again underlines the decisive action that Air Arm develop in this period of struggle.

Signed Marshal Kesselring

In relation to this & heard by the Chief of the Air Force G.S. request of this Command have since our Air Force adapt fully to the above directives that have been agreed between Marshal Kesselring and the Supreme Command.

Signed Ugo Cavallero

Established the first official contacts and the most urgent operational instructions that X CAT, the command Luftflotte 2 was giving guidelines for action also at II Flieger Korps aimed at the gradual implementation of an offensive plan of Malta, first with disturbance missions and then gradually the crews gained confidence and experience with the new type of struggle, with precision intensified attacks and highly destructive such as to exclude for a certain period of time the repetition of the missions on the same objectives.

In addition to supporting the military operations in Libya, the aircraft of the X CAT again mined Egyptian ports and those of Libya occupied by the British, attacked with torpedoes naval convoys and bombed directly ships in Tobruk, Derna and Benghazi damaging the cruiser "Najad", DDs. "Kipling", "Maori" and merchant ships in port and at sea.

December 16 formations of Italian and German bombers participated together for the first time in a night raid on Maltese targets and this event virtually and officially marked the beginning of the activity of the 2nd Fleet Air and II Flieger Korps in the Mediterranean War.

The continued offensive missions in the days December 21st (day and night attacks), the 23rd, the 25th (downing of 2 “Hurricane” by Bf.109 escort), the 28th (3 enemy aircraft shot down and others burned on the ground) and finally topped it December 30th with serious damage to ships in the Grand Harbour and the destruction of three fighters intercepted by Messerschmitt escorting bombers.

The beginning was cautious and gradual as envisaged in the program, but serious concerns were gathering for the defenders of the island in the year 1942.

In December, the II CAT now ready at 70% to carry out on Malta 185 missions-aircraft and 78 more were being carried out by the Regina Areonautica.

The island had command immediate feeling that a new storm was breaking down more destructive dimensions of Malta with the arrival of the II Flieger Korps.

The relocation of the Luftflotte 2 flight departments to Italian airfields entailed the hiring of numerous Italian civilian personnel to carry out the various services and free the German aviators from duties unrelated to war activities.[400]

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Just under 7,000 people were employed and distributed between the airfields of: Comiso (2,279), Catania (2,704), Gerbini (1,117), Trapani (339), Reggio Calabria (321) and Palermo (40).

In addition to the airports assigned for operating on requirements, the Luftwaffe later took some courses in order to install the Schools of specialties and as a technical-logistical rear bases and Superaereo designated to such tasks the airports Piacenza (Stukas), Grosseto (torpedo planes), Foggia (Fighters), Gerbini (Bombardment), Trapani (Bombardment dive) and Catania (Reconnaissance).

As a first measure to neutralize Malta, the 3rd Torpedo Flotilla of Kriegsmarine based in Sicily, in December mined access to the Grand Harbour with magnetic and acoustic mines causing serious damage to the British fleet and managing to paralyze for a certain period of time naval activity.

Ended in 1941 with the Air Force/Sicily war activities whose potential and efficiency had significantly lower effects demonstrated for results and what it had achieved in the six months of 1940 the 2nd Air Fleet with his strong and fierce bombing component, however, acceptable results under the profile of relativity and, as he said in his writings von Clausewitz, "in proportion to the means and the purpose to be achieved" if we think that in the six months of '40 in which it worked in Sicily 2nd Air Fleet, took against Malta targets a total of 403 bombers, about as many sent in the month of May 1941, by CAT X, and, continuing exposure of the statistical data, are found even more obvious aspects rebased on the number aircraft and the actions carried out, such as to summary justice for the sake of historical truth, the contribution made by the Luftwaffe in the hard, bloody war waged in common in the Mediterranean with Italian aviation.

"These results are not corresponding to the many means employed," said the "Confidential Report" published by “reliable source” on 19 June 1941 at the time of departure of the X CAT from Sicily, and continued: "La Valletta still retains at reduced activity that was forced by the actions of the planes of the 2nd Air Fleet and the airfields are now in full swing and with a greater number of aircraft than existing five months ago, "and again," the island of Malta in essence, it was neutralized by the Italian units methodically, policy and capabilities in command and execution. "

The progression of air reinforcements received by the RAF Malta during 1941 was as follows:

Jan.-Feb.-March	n. 34	(Hurricane-Blenheim)
April	n. 16	(Fulmar FAA)
	n. 35	(Hurricane)
May	n. 47	(Hurricane)
	n. 12	(Wellington)
June	n. 1.8	(Beaufighter)
	n. 43	(Hurricane)
September	n. 49	(Hurricane)
	n. 6	(Blenheim)
November	n. 37	(Hurricane)
TOTAL	n. 297 aircraft	

In fact Malta, for all 36 months of the war when it was subjected to attacks of every kind, symbolically represented the defensive and offensive capabilities that could be expressed in a modern war, a natural fortress strengthened by armored works, supported by a forward-looking organization efficient and scientifically equipped with electric radio equipment for all operational requirements, defensive and offensive, with hundreds of anti-aircraft and anti-ship batteries with limitless airport surfaces, dozens of tracks and omnidirectional fittings, shelters, workshops and decentralized warehouses, protected pitches for aircraft , a constant renewal of increasingly modern and efficient material, a scheduled rotation of personnel, a will and admirable tenacity which made up the whole of the island defensive organization, the success of the resistance secret that only a direct attack, led by paratroopers and landing troops at the very heart of the island, could undermine and crashed traumatically.

One option rejected at the beginning of the war, which it was presented again as an extreme success ratio in 1942 with the task C.3.

In 1941 the OKW began unilaterally the preliminary study for its part of landing on Malta entrusted entirely to German units (a paratroopers plus an air-landing division) with the support of specialists and of course the Luftwaffe (X Flieger Korps).[401]

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The plan called for the destruction and disorganization of the enemy defenses and soon after the airdrop to conquer airports (one or two airfields) on which to inject the Luftlande division with heavy weapons and armored vehicles. It was also expected the aid of the Italian Navy in the second phase of operations.

But also the Italian G.S.G was concerned about the situation taking into updated plans and projects to win over Malta, and among these the SM.71/S plot hatched by the navy and continuously supplemented with new information, while for its part the GSA was preparing the support plan for the landing operation and divided:

a) protection of ports of embarkation and convoys during daytime navigation;

b) wide-ranging explorations on the former route of enemy Naval Forces;

c) attacks on enemy Naval Forces by bombers/torpedo planes and the naval air base of Malta;

d) actions of attack in the preparation of the landing stage: the bombing, fragmentation, strafing, fighter protection;

e) launch of paratroopers and troop transport on busy airports.

Units provided: 5 bomber Stormos (Wings), two squadrons of torpedo bombers, 5 fighter groups. In the fall of 1941 began to take shape and the consistency requirement C.3, which, starting from October 14, 1941 received an official designation as part of Gen. Cavallero, that the matter constituted a joint committee of all the Armed Forces to plan, prepare, coordinate, plan and implement winning the tough enemy fortress.

During 1941 the average efficiency (minimum and maximum) of the Air Force/Sicily bombers was 14 aircraft in January and 55 in November, that of dive bombers 3 in December and 16 in July, torpedo bombers were from a minimum of three aircraft in January to a maximum of 9 August, the fighters went from 46 in January to 125 in October giving even blatant and confirms upward evolution statistical evidence suffered from June 1940 when their number accounted for only 25% of the bomber force in Sicily. Average number of Air Force/Sicily in 1941: 63 aircraft in January, 198 in October.

The average efficiency of the X CAT between January and May was instead the following:

High altitude Bombers: 63 in January - 118 in April
Stukas: 50 in February - 80 in May
Fighters: 24 in January - 62 in May

Means X Flieger Korps: 141 in January, 243 in May with a numerical disproportion with the Air Force/Sicily in the same period of 80%.

Military and merchant ships sunk by X Flieger Korps (10 Jan. - 22 May 1941) n. 58 ships for 183,400 tons.

On December 18, a section of SM.84 offensive reconnaissance of Malta was attacked by "Hurricane" that shooting down a tri-motor in flames of the 109th Group BT damaging another bomber with dead and wounded on board.

Continued relentlessly until the last drip of pilots and crews of the Royal Air Force, which in 1941 had lost over Malta two wing, three group, three squadron commanders, 185 between pilots and specialists, officers, non-commissioned officers, and graduated.

1941 - WAR ACTIVITIES

	aircraft used	
	Air Force – Sicily (January to December)	*X C.A.T. -II C.A.T.* (January to May / December)
Bombing of Malta	651	2371 (1,364,000 Kg. Bombs)
Reconnaissance in views - offensive	203	593
convoys escort (bombers -recon)	255	666
maritime exploration -rescue	2,050	546
various Missions	111	139
ships torpedoed	34	64 (68 torpedoes)
Recon. offensive N.A.	121	34[402]

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fighter missions	1,165	954
bombers escort	928	65
torpedo bombers escort	240	40
convoy escort	5,575	721
Strafing - fragmentation	149	16
offensive reconnaissance	832	146
Missions various	332	224
various missions - alarm	3177	16
Total	15,823	6,595

Aircraft lost by X CAT -II CAT	81
Aircraft destroyed on the ground or incidents of X CAT	86
Enemy aircraft shot down by the X CAT -II CAT	84

AIR FORCE SICILY - WAR ACTIVITY
(01/01/1941 / 12/31/1941)

bombing –torpedo bombers	
Missions performed	n. 975
flight hours	n. 11,646
aircraft used	n. 3,900
Amount of explosives launched	482,000 kg (32 torpedoes)
aircraft lost in action	n. 32
aircraft stricken or destroyed - accidents	n. 42
enemy aircraft shot down	n. 2
Strategic reconnaissance - Land	
Missions carried out	n. 190
flight hours	n. 393
aircraft used	n. 135
Amount of explosives launched	860 kg
Aircraft lost in action	n. 3
aircraft stricken or destroyed - accidents	n. 2
enemy aircraft shot down	n. 1
Fighters	
missions carried out	n. 3,017
flight hours	n. 18,118
aircraft used	n. 12,398
Bombs launched (n. 146)	1,120 kg
bullets fired	n. 860,000
Aircraft lost in action	n. 38
aircraft stricken or destroyed - accidents	n. 32
enemy aircraft shot down	n. 128
Aircraft destroyed on the ground (number unknown)[403]	

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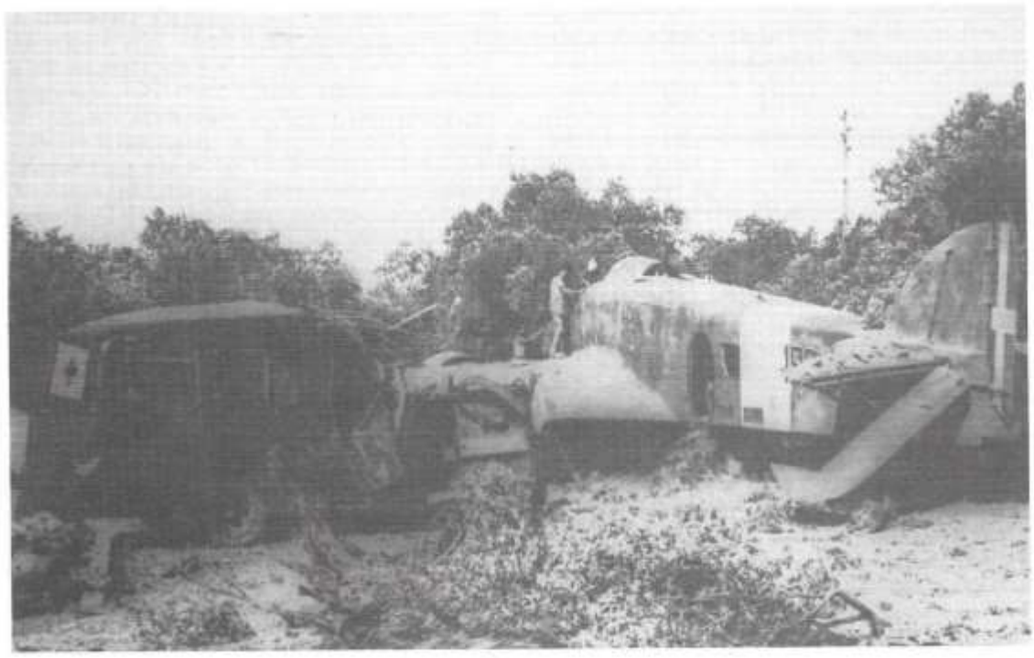
SUMMARY

missions performed	n. 4,182
flight hours	n. 30,157
used aircraft	n. 17,158
aircraft lost in action	n. 73
downed aircraft	n. 131
	(+ 34 MACA-R.M.)
Aircraft struck (or destroyed - accident)	n. 76
explosives launched	484480 kg.

DECEASED STAFF

Officers	n. 59
non-commissioned officers	n. 46
graduated specialists	n. 88
airmen	n. 21
injuries	n. 104[404]

Crash landing of a SM. 79 of 193rd Sqd. (Capt. S. Crosara) 87th Group/30th Stormo BT. The three-engined SIAI had great importance in the activity of the war in the Mediterranean and as a torpedo bombers with models SM 79 /SM.84.



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SARDINIA

In 1941 Sardinia still covered in the Italian strategy in the Mediterranean is of great importance, although the cessation of hostilities with France had dimensioned only to areas west and south, the attention of the General Staff and suggested some changes to the deployment of the units. The three bombing Stormo of June 1940 (8th, 31st and 32nd) were reduced to two in January after the dissolution of the 31st of BM, and offensive strength was decreased from 93 bombers of the previous year to 65 in 1941, a decrease of 30%. For fighters, the situation remained equally unchanged except for the gradual replacement of old CR.32 with the more efficient but also outdated CR.42; rather was disappeared from the island component of the assault/combat with Ba.88 removed from the 1st line.

The deployment of the units as of 1 Jan. 1941 resulted the following:

8th Stormo BT (Col. Victor Ferrante) with 27th Group (Lt. Col. Eugenio Mazzola) in Alghero with 18th Sqd. (Capt. L. Bosticco) and 52nd (Capt. L. Zanzottera).

28th Group (Maj. Michael Banchio) in Decimomannu – 10th Sqd. (Capt. A. Baisi) and 19th (Capt. L. Canaletti).

32nd Stormo BT (Col. Luigi Gallo) - Decimomannu. 38th Group (Lt. Col. Oscar Mecozzi) Sqd. 49th (Capt. Armando Boetto) and Sqd. 50th (Capt. Nicola matchmaker).

89th Group (Maj. Antonio Fadda) Sqd. 228th (Capt. A. Magistrelli then Capt. G. Falciola) Sqd. 229th (Capt. C. Mancini then Capt. Cesare Prato).

The two Stormo possessed tri-engined SM.79. 93rd Group BM (Lt. Col. Domenica Docimo) Cagliari/Elmas with Sqd. 196th (Capt. G. Dottore) and 197th (Capt. G. Risaliti) and a allotment of 9 Cant.506/B.

3rd Group Autonomo CT (Lt. Col. Innocent Monti) divided between Montserrat -Sqd. 153rd (Capt. G. Tugnoli then Lt. M. Mancini), 154th (Capt. G. Tovazzi) and Alghero with the 155th Sqd. (Capt. F. Sforza).

Maritime Reconnaissance was available the 85th Group RM (Maj. Gennaro Venditti) with 146th Sqd. (Capt. F. Mannu then Capt. Mario De Biase), 188th (Capt. F. Frezza) at Elmas with 5th Sec. Olbia. Altogether 19 Cant.501 and 5 Cant.506.

Air Force Observation for the Army possessed the 124th Sqd. Aut. OA at Elmas with a section at Alghero with 12 Ro.37.

Rescue was set up with the 613th Sqd./S with 5 S.66 between Elmas and Qlbia.[405]

Pilots of the 3rd Group Independent CT. observe the acrobatics maneuver of their units. The fighter part of Sardinia was gradually improved adding to CR32/42, the G. 50 and the Me 200.

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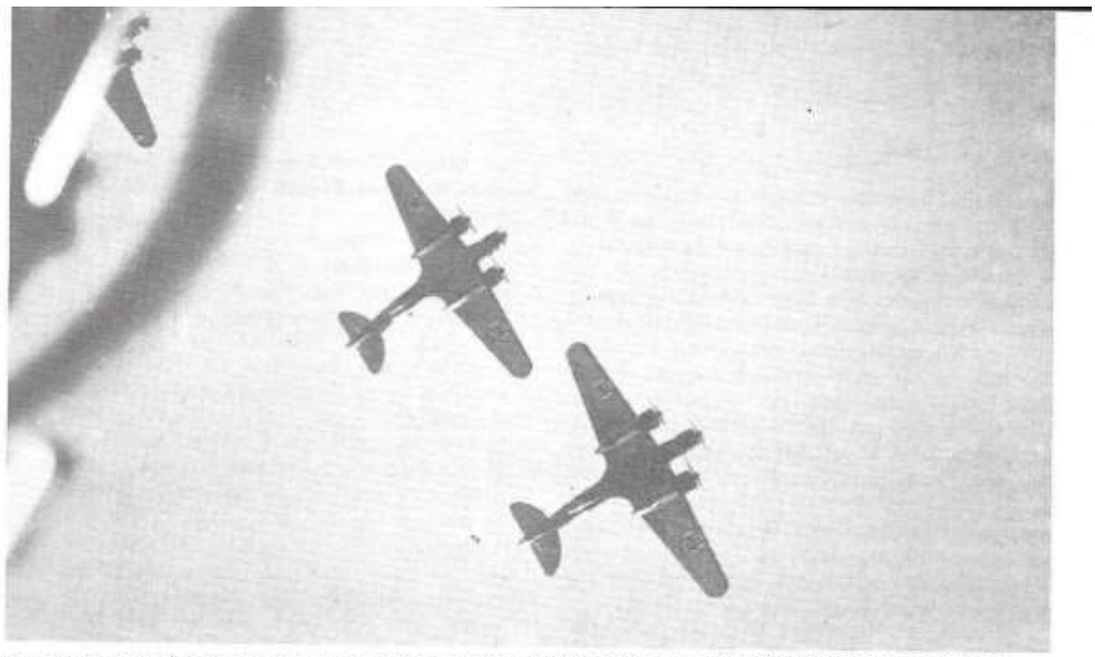

Bombers of the 32nd Stormo BT. in flight to attack an enemy naval formation. The units of Sardinia had a strategic task prevent enemy territorial offenses and first to attack the British.

The Air Force Commander/Sardinia, Gen. D.A. Ottorino Vespignani had Col. Giovanni Coppi as chief of the G.S. with the forces available to the Air Arm the following strategic requirements:

1) Contrast to the west against enemy Naval Forces operating in the Mediterranean, coming from Gibraltar.

2) Bar access and contrast to the south against Naval Forces entering or leaving the Channel of Sicily.

3) Hitting offensively enemy bases in the western basin (Gibraltar).

4) Protect the central metropolis against any enemy air penetrations proved the most exposed enemy offense in the event of use of aircraft carriers.

With aircraft of Maritime Reconnaissance were instead to achieve results in a strategic function (distance tracking of the western basin of the Mediterranean) in cooperation with terrestrial aircraft that would provide Supermarina Command Air Force/Sardinia and: coastal protection and antisubmarine on routes between the mainland and Sardinia-Sicily and Sardinia to ensure navigation vessels and convoys, ensure air rescue activities with S.66 seaplanes of the 613th Sqd./S. The 124th Sqd. collaborated with Marinavia for Antisom surveillance.

The geographical position of Sardinia allow us to meet our very important tasks in the strategic environment of the Mediterranean and the decision taken by Superaereo to leave undefended and greatly reduce the bomber component, it was accepted reluctantly because of pressure from Stamage, concerned about the military situation that had been created in other operating theaters of Northern -Africa and Albania - which required the continued commitment of the Air Force at the daily and not occasional but important missions, such as could occur for the Air Force/Sardinia.

To compensate for this decrease in offensive capability, the G.S.A decided to partially solve the problem by assigning the Air Force/Sardinia units of torpedo bombers, as the AS Training units deliberating the suitability of new crews giving the opportunity to the relevant Inspectorate proceed with the establishment of new units.

Already on February 11, a newly formed torpedo bomber squadron - 280th – under the command of Captain Amedeo Moioli moved to Sardinia at Elmas, 6 SM.79 strong.

But before this incident there had been other events that had affected the Air Force/Sardinian war activity.[406]

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The first intervention of the air forces of Sardinia took place in early January when the British carried out operation "Excess", the first of 1941, sending to supply Malta.

4 ships participating in the operation for approximately 40,000 GRT, one for Malta with 4,000 tons of ammunition and three for Greece with military supplies, which would depart from Gibraltar with the escort of Force H (BC “Renown”, BB “Malaya”) CV "Ark Royal", two CL. and 11 DD. A second convoy from Alexandria to Malta consists of two large merchant for 20,000 GRT, had to carry fuel oil and gasoline and other war material to the island, with the escort of the MF formed by BBs "Barham", "Warspite" and "Valiant" backed by the CV "Illustrious" and "Eagle", 7 CL., 17 DD., 4 corvettes, three submarines divided into 6 independent operating groups but interconnected with each other in complex operation which involved, among other things, the transfer from Malta to Alexandria of 14 empty ships stranded on the island for some time but needed for further supplies in the Mediterranean.

A mass of impressive and multifaceted Naval Force whose potential would be surpassed only in operation "Torch".

The Royal Navy fielded a total of five battleships, three aircraft carriers, nine cruisers between heavy and light, 28 DD and four corvettes - a total of 360,000 tons of military shipping to protect 70,000 gross tonnage of loaded merchant ships with a greater than 5:1 proportion.

Force H from Gibraltar would be partly relieved and reinforced at the western entrance to the Strait of Sicily by 2 cruisers

- (Force B) that would have accompanied until meeting - Force A (2 BB. -1 CV -8 DD), would then reverse route directed to the west while another support group - Force F (1 CL., 4 DD.) -would continued escort mission detached from Force H. the another - Force C support groups, D and X had escort tasks to direct merchant in Malta and Piraeus.

The air component assigned to "Excess" was comprised of 110 FAA aircraft - fighter bombers - torpedo bombers - scouts embarked on three aircraft carriers which were to add twenty catapulable floatplanes supplied to battleships and heavy cruisers and also the scouts a great autonomy the Coastal Command of Gibraltar, with torpedo bombers, fighters and bombers based in Malta.[407]

Gen. DA Aldo Urbani new commander of the Air Force/Sardinia in conversation with some wing commanders based on the island. At the beginning of 1941 there were in Sardinia from the 8th and 32nd Stormo BT, 93rd Group BM and the 3rd CT.

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As appendix to operation "Excess", it was expected to thrust against the Italian traffic to Libya by using particularly the aircraft embarked on the carrier "Eagle."

On January 6, operation "Excess" began with the departure from Gibraltar of Force H duly reported by our informants on site. The same day moved Force B with vessels in Malta and the next day the groups formed by the Mediterranean Fleet in Alexandria, some of which in particular the Force A (BB. "Warspite", "Valiant" and CV "Illustrious" with 9 DD. escort) in the Aegean were spotted by a scout at 16:40 of the 7th who circulated the wireless alarm.

The 8th were made other sightings by the Air Force of the Aegean and that of Sicily and the light of Pantelleria signaled the night passage of Force B (CL. "Gloucester" and "Southampton" with a DD escort).

On the morning of the 9th Force H was sighted 100 miles S.W. Capo Teulada Sardinia, a formation which had sent off in the meantime by CV "Ark Royal", 5 "Swordfish" destined to Malta at a distance of 560 km, which regularly reached the island three hours after launch landing at Luqa.

Other scouts were sent on a mission to Sardinia, the Strait of Sicily and Malta with "Fulmar" fighter escort.

In the face of such an imposing deployment of enemy naval forces, Supermarina decided to operate with torpedo bombers and insidious ships preserving naval Battle Fleet units from the danger coming from dangerous embarked aviation, which already had caused serious damage to the Italian Navy in the fatal night of Taranto. It was obviously blocked boat traffic with Libya and the Aegean, a supplemental service activated with anti-submarine aircraft for the presence of enemy submarines spotted between Sardinia, Sicily and the Gulf of Salerno, also intensified the anti-submarine search service with torpedo boats and MAS; Superaereo had implemented in the meantime the following provisions:

1) Setup in Sardinia of a forward line with 10 bombers and adequate fighter escort.

2) constitution in Sicily of an offensive force with 15 bombers, 6 torpedo planes and 12 dive bombers escorted by fighters and participation by the X CAT - newcomer -with 54 Ju.87, 32 He.111, 13 Bf.l10 escort.

3) Activation of a stronger service and continued reconnaissance of Marinavia to control the situation in the central and western Mediterranean, and partially also in the east, which seemed destined to remain excluded in the context of enemy operations.

The aerial reconnaissance makes methodically and intensely on days 7, 8 and 9 January were crucial to know the wide and complex operation: in all its manifestations offensive, defensive and support and have a complete picture of the situation.

The Air Force-Sardinia as soon as the Force H came within range of its bombers, sent from Decimomannu the 89th Group with 10 three-engined SM.79 took off at 12:25 under the command of Maj. Antonio Fadda, with the task to disregard the escort ships and strike mainly the cargo ships.

An hour later Force H was sighted with its powerful ships and aircraft carriers, but no trace of the convoy as it probably well back in the position of indirect escort.

Decided to attack anyway despite having inadequate ammunition for weight and characteristics, the bombers of 32nd Stormo dropped bombs in a violent anti-aircraft fire that caused the loss of a SM79 and soon after they were attacked by the "Fulmar" of the "Ark Royal" that felled another tri-motor and damaging others, but the intervention of a patrol of CR.42 from the 3rd Group CT could block the pursuers and arrest the vehemence of with the demolition of a embarked fighter aircraft. Throughout the day there had been executed on Force H, 7 air reconnaissance missions.

The poor availability of residual light did not allow further attacks and any decision on the matter was referred to the next day. Navigation of Force H which had reversed course had no further news, while the Force A who had assumed the task of protecting the convoy to Malta had some misadventures. The DD "Gallant" ran into a mine, lost his bow and was taken in tow by the "Mohawk" that accompanied him until the 10th into Malta undergoing a torpedo bomber attack from Sicily (Capt. Bernardini and Frongia) of the 279th Sqd. AS; later - between 11:30 and 18:00 - the British ships were attacked several times by German bombers at height and dive bombers, then again by torpedo bombers of the 279th Sqd. and then again by Stukas that seriously affected the "Illustrious" and damage the "Warspite". [408]

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Preparations for the launch of an SM 79 of 283rd Sqd AS. Torpedos are already placed under the fuselage, men control the material to be loaded on board and will soon take off to deal with enemy ships.

In the evening torpedo bombers attacked other ships. The “Fulmar” abandoned the damaged aircraft carrier and headed for Malta to refuel and continue to protect the "Illustrious”. It is due to their presence and dedication of the dive bombers if the ship was not sunk in subsequent attacks of Stukas, of which 6 were shot down.

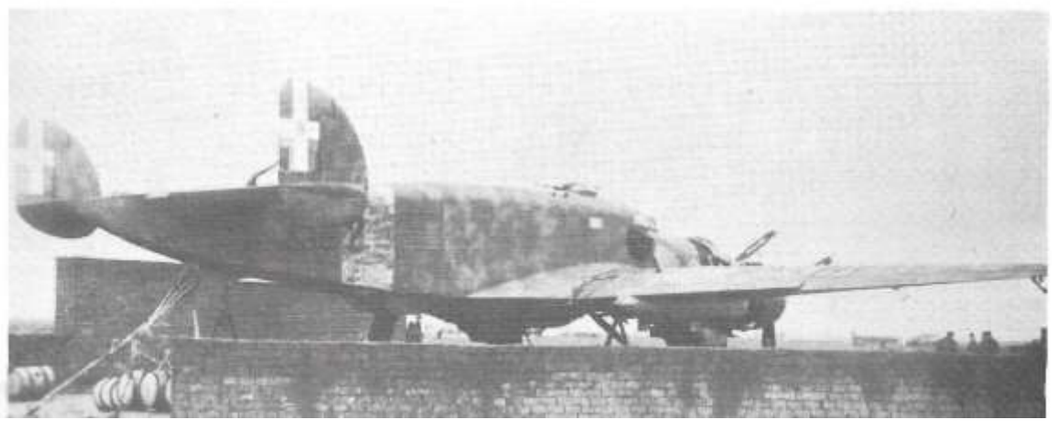
In addition to numerous attacks by German and Italian formations located in Sicily, they had been carried out 12 searched at sea in the Channel of Sicily and Malta, to provide continuously updated information on the situation ascertained commands at sea and in the base of Malta. Excellent service that went very useful to plan the offensive missions.

On January 11 the British suffered more heavy air raids: of torpedo bombers of the 279th attacks that lack little the “Valiant”, attacks of Italian and German dive bombers escorted by MC.200 hitting the “Gloucester", in the fire control and much more seriously the "Southampton", which burnt down and was reduced to floating hulk, was abandoned and finished with a torpedo from a destroyer escort. The "Warspite" was again hit.

Later in the day the maritime reconnaissance had carried out 10 missions constantly updating the situation.

Adm. Cunningham was very impressed by the dive attacks conducted by the Stukas and so wrote: "The efforts of the Royal Air Force were nothing compared to the deadly attacks of the Stukas of the Luftwaffe." [409]

A SM 84 of the 258th Sqd. in a defensive pit on the airport of Decimomannu (Cagliari) In the attacks on British ships they killed the commander of the Stormo, a group commander, two squadron commanders; a total of 29 Airmen of the 36th Stormo AS.



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This was his comment when, satisfied with having saved the major units of the Mediterranean Fleet thanks to luck, he headed for Alexandria after having lost only one heavy cruiser and practically an aircraft carrier which would never return to service in the Mediterranean Battle Squadron and a DD due to the damage suffered.

The goal of reinforcing Malta making essential food to arrive, however, had been made, and this result could be considered strategically positive even though it was paid dearly.

During the month of January Sardinia had not suffered any enemy air raid except for sporadic sightings of isolated planes that were kept off the island. The month of February had been an attempt to bomb the largest dam in Tirso which provided electricity to Sardinia, try using 8 "Swordfish" and "Skua" launched by the "Ark Royal" to hit with bombs and torpedoes the great dam work; but the mission failed and an enemy plane was shot down by anti-aircraft fire and three man crew captured after - parachuting.

The torpedo bomber mission was designed and implemented on purpose to divert attention of the northern Italian aviation from the western Mediterranean area on which the Force H was sailing to directly bombard Genoa.

But this mission that was canceled due to bad weather and disregarded by Italian reconnaissance sighted Force H south of the Balearic directed to Gibraltar.

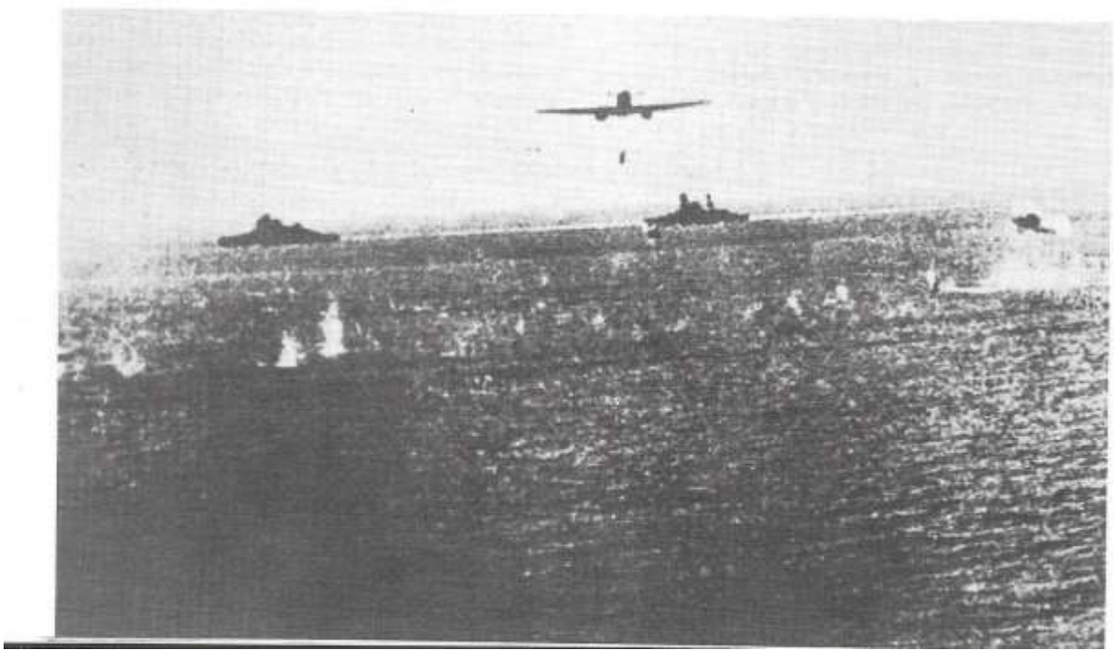
The first week of the month Superaereo was informed by SIM and SIA, the new departure from Gibraltar of Force H (Adm. Somerville) with two BB, a CV and several cruisers and DD direct waning.

Even Supermarina was obviously aware of the news and gave the necessary directives to the Naval Forces waiting for a greater clarification of the situation.

The new British mission called "Operation Grog", aimed to bomb Genoa to strike ships at anchor, shipyards and important war industries of the city.

Besides the attack, brought in the very heart of Italy and not in his insular bases, it would have had a huge psychological effect and propaganda, increasing even more the moral supremacy and respect that the English Navy had earned with the three daring missions in the seas surrounding Italy.[410]

Attack of an SM 79 torpedo against British ships in the western Mediterranean. Several aircraft were lost to enemy fighters taking off from the aircraft carrier used in operations forcing the Sicilian Channel.



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“Grog” was devised in the form very developed to evade the surveillance of our agents placed between Algeciras and Tangier, which accurately controlled every movement, entry and exit from Gibraltar, and was divided into the following movements:

Subdivision of Force H in moved in three groups in opposite directions, the next night meeting in the Mediterranean and sail to the east with the northern route the Balearics which were presumed totally uncontrolled by the Italian long-range reconnaissance.

In addition to the bombardment of Genoa, the “Grog” covered the mining of the Gulf of La Spezia with magnetic mines launched from aircraft and the bombing with aircraft of "Ark Royal” the largest STANIC refinery in Livorno.

They participated in the operation were the BB. "Renown," "Malaya", the CV "Ark Royal", the CL. "Sheffield" and 10 DD. The embarked FAA air force “830th/840th Sqdns with 70 aircraft of all specialties.

On 6 February, the operation was begin in the morning of the 7th with Force H now met in full in the Mediterranean, sailed eastward with N.E. route and headed to the Balearic Islands. The RAF Malta had to play in the context of “Grog” some diversionary missions, including bombing the Sardinian airports and make a survey of Genova to ascertain the situation and location of the Italian BB being repaired after the attack on Taranto (Duilio and Giulio Cesare); but the missions were not performed for the situation of Maltese airports hit hard by the Luftwaffe and extreme weather conditions with low clouds.

The help of the radar was a great help in navigating Force H for the presence of ships and planes and take appropriate precautions and since the 8th of Admiral Somerville had the situation under constant control by the patrols, reconnaissance aircraft airborne and surveillance periodically launch from the "Ark Royal”.

At 05:00 on 9 February the "Ark Royal" with the escort of three DD turned east to Livorno to perform with his aircraft first the planned bombing and second the mining of the Gulf of La Spezia. At 70 miles from Livorno (about 110 km away as the crow flies) and at equal distance from La Spezia (8° 50' Lat. 45 ° 43 Long) the aircraft carrier launched between 06:10/06:25 hours were eighteen Fairey "Swordfish" armed with 56 bombs of 125 kg and 224 incendiary clips from 2 kg and 4 of the magnetic mines MK.II type to 530 kg.

The STANIC refinery suffered negligible damage and the anti-aircraft artillery shot down a carrier borne bomber; the mine aircraft dropped their bombs in front of La Spezia themselves the object of intense anti-aircraft fire.

Before the "Swordfish" were recovered on the "Ark Royal”, the aircraft carrier sent off three other scouts escorted by 8 “Fulmar” for the assistance provided to the Force H deployed further north, and then reversed the route to the west, where would arrive at the end of their mission the aircraft FAA. At 07:10 the BB. "Renown" and "Malaya" catapulted their floatplanes for the observation of the shot, and so did the CL "Sheffield" in charge of the protection at a distance of the larger ships. At 07:52 Force H was put on course parallel to the coast and at 08:14 the guns opened fire on Genova distance of 19,000 meters, continuing it until 08:45 during which were fired over 1,450 large and medium caliber shells caused 144 deaths and 272 injured, and more or less serious damage to ships in port, building sites, industrial factories and plants in the area. The mission “Grog” was fully successful!

The lack of offensive initiative reaction of the enemy on Italian soil as part of the Air Force and Navy, was to be found in several cases, but by no means justified because contrasting each of the two armed forces together with the Stamage had its share of responsibility of the event, and mainly the lack of monitoring in the northern part of the western Mediterranean between 41° long./6° lat., from which no one expected the surprise: a serious malfunction in defensive organization and the assignment of service competence in the specific context largest and most general of the territorial defense of the Nation.

However, it is necessary to make some clarifications in this regard.

The presence of the Force H at sea was known since the day of February 7 and this event snapped as usual, the alarm device; Supermarina put on alert the Battle Fleet comprising BB. "Vittorio Veneto", "Caesar," "Doria" moored to La Spezia with the support of the 3rd Cruiser Div. (Trieste, Trento, Bolzano) and adequate DD escort.[411]

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The aerial reconnaissance ordered by the 8th Supermarina (from which depended as employment the Marinavia units) had the, task of exploring areas up to 39°/40° parallel and to the meridian 4° (the area south of Blaleari) to more than 250 miles to the west of Sardinia, in a widely understood area within a radius of autonomy of the Cant. 501/506. The area to be explored arrived normally until the meridian in 2° 40' it was then overlooked for Supermarina provisions. The Navy Command for Sardinia asked what the island Air force, as necessary, to also complement surveillance missions with terrestrial aircraft, and the Air force-Sardinia assigned SM.79 4 and 8 Ju.88 of X CAT as well as a Cant.1007 Bis of the 51st Group BT being transferred to Sardinia, which was located on the airport of Pisa and 4 Cant.506 of the 93rd Group BM - all Air Force aircraft and on which Supermarina had no dependence of service.

The explorations were carried out in the west of Sardinia, on the Ligurian Sea, west of Corsica; other air force aircraft-Sicily had exploratory tasks in the area south of Sardinia and west of the western basin of the Sicilian Channel.

Concurrently with these usual safety provisions, Superaereo arranged to bring state of the alarm the 7th Stormo BT at Cameri, the 13th and 43rd at Piacenza and at Lonate Pozzolo, all of BR.20, and in different conditions of efficiency with about sixty bombers ready for use, as well as fighter units in the defense of Liguria; all these units dependent on the 1st Air Fleet of Milan.

In the relevant area of the 3rd Air Fleet of Rome, they were alerted: 10th Stormo BT in Viterbo available with 18 SM.79 efficient (9th Stormo BT was devoid of equipment being reconstitution in Viterbo), the 33rd Group Aut. BT in Pisa with 5 SM.79, and as mentioned, the 51st Group of the 16th Stormo BT being transferred to Alghero with 20 Cant. 1007 Bis - ie all units who gravitated in the western part of the center-north from which loomed the potential threat-a prudential measure that was adopted normally in these cases of pre territorial alarm.

The sector of the meridian in 2° 40', specifically excluded from the aerial exploration as per provisions of Supermarina, was crossed by Force H at 10:15 hours of the 8th, which explains the lack of spotting enemy ships that sailed to the northeast away more and more of the another, from 40° parallel silts set a rule for longitudinal explorations.

The explorations in the sea were thus fatally negative way; but there were some significant symptoms of the presence of an aircraft carrier at sea because some aircraft were attacked by embarked fighter type and other aircraft sighted and recognized the naval reconnaissance type. The general situation Stamage elaborated by the end of the 8th, while it excluded the presence of enemy ships south of the 40° parallel, whose area was thickly combed, did not exclude certain probability to the north of this demarcation and how to question this assumption entrusted to Supermarina, suggested the release of the Battle Fleet from La Spezia under command of Adm. Angelo Jachino to converge at a point fixed center of gravity 50 miles west of Capo Testa in pending clarification of the situation, the new reports and orders, in connection with any sightings, although Supermarina considered unlikely a bombardment of Genoa by the enemy naval force mistakenly held south of the Balearics, serious inference that this was the source of surprise for Supermarina largely satisfied with that remote possibility, although reports were missing in SW sector and sightings of return to Gibraltar.

On the 9th, according to the directives of the commands involved, had to be repeated more intensely aerial explorations, S., S.W., N.W., alarmed the territorial sea defenses, suspended as a precautionary measure traffic with Libya. Specifically scans also had to embrace the neglected area the previous day until 3° meridian (south and north of the Balearic Islands) and also include the 42° parallel in zone that is where Force H went unnoticed since the 8th. At 07:40 Adm. Jachino had news of the bombing of Livorno and La Spezia by embarked aircraft and the likely presence of the enemy ships on the Tyrrhenian Sea, but no certainty about it, even though such information automatically signaled the presence of a CV. At that moment Jachino was with his ships at Asinara about 240 miles away from the Force H and lacked little less than half an hour at the beginning of the opening of fire by the British ships on Genoa city nestled in the Sunday rest.[412]

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Superaereo heard the news of the bombing of Genoa via wire at 08:55 and gave the alarm to the interested commands of the Air Fleets and the Air Force Sardinia, while Adm. Jachino in the belief that the enemy Naval Force wanted to take action against Sardinia and still unaware of the bombardment of Genoa, was catapulted at 08:55 hours a Ro.43 from the “Balzano” and later that of the "Trento," which explored - uselessly - the entire western coast of Sardinia - from the north and south - to then alight at the end of the mission at Elmas. Of course the exploration fails because the Force H was much further north in the Gulf Ligure, had finished hitting Genoa and sailing at full steam towards the west to return to Gibraltar.

Only at 09:12 did Adm. Jachino received confirmation and detailed information of the incident by Supermarina and the peremptory order to head north to cut the road to Force H.

The existing widespread cloudiness in the Ligurian Gulf did not allow precise aircraft sightings and only at 11:15 after many unconfirmed reports, was it certain that he had finally located the enemy ships in the position Lat 43° - 9° Long. (South of San Remo) from a Cant.506 the 287th Sqd. RM, eliminating uncertainties, false alarms and incorrect information received until then the Commands interested and often conflicting with one another, to the point that the 32nd Sormo BT started from Decimomannu with 20 bombers directed to position 39° Long. - 5° Lat. (East of Menorca) it found the ships of Force H and had to return to base without having achieved anything positive.

The delay in the transmissions, the uncertainties in sightings, malfunctions for reasons of hierarchical competence between the various Italian command, the different interpretations about what to do and the various assumptions made to hit the enemy, formed the most negative aspect and emblematic expressed by cumbersome of the Italian Armed Forces command body, manifested by a number of unforeseen factors that enabled the Force H to exit the bold and daring mission undertaken without any consequence.

Yet on the 9th the grandeur of the used aircraft would surely produce some effect, whereas the only Maritime Reconnaissance employed 20 Cant.501 and 12 Cant.506 and the Fleet of two Ro.43, while the 1st Air Fleet did intervene with 9 BR.20 bombers and 2 CR.42 fighters; 3rd Air Fleet 15 Cant.1007 Bis, 7 fighters and a ground reconnaissance; the Air Force-Sardinia 34 SM.79 and 4 Cant.506 /B, excluding from the calculation the Air Force/Sicily with two scouts and X CAT available with between 77 bombers and reconnaissance aircraft and 18 twin-engine heavy fighter: 108 Italian aircraft and 88 Germans between bombers and fighters who gave hours to hunting ghosts.

The delays with which offensive missions by the Air Force were started, were found primarily in the rejection or acceptance of use of two concepts: 1st- the immediate takeoff from bombing formations directed presumably in the area where they had to find the enemy ships (Gulf Ligure) – 2nd wait more precise information on the sighting and act with greater security of results.

The evidence shows neither intervention criteria available was justified by the fact, as in the first case would be considerably increased the possibility of immediate reaction, which is the basis of the criteria for action, aviation, and flying in formations area scout (4100x250 km) would surely have found - sooner or later - the enemy ships during return. In the second case the uncertainties of the sightings made significantly delay the departure of the aircraft, reducing to a few hours available technical time needed to plan the attacks. Were missing, among other things Gen. Santoro wrote: "... timeliness and initiative." Italian Naval Fleet while acting belatedly after the misunderstanding of the morning recovered largely lost time heading to N.W. to intersect, in Adm. Jachino intentions, the estimated return route of the Force H, supported by the fact that the Adm. Jachino with intelligent wit, did take the Fleet on route 330° (the Hyères islands direction) but at 13:00 Supermarina did alter course for 030° as a result of the sighting vessel, aircraft carrier S.W. La Spezia, and thus the route that would have intersected with security at 14:30 about the director of navigation of the Force H, remained empty for the absence of the Italian Battle Fleet diverted to the N.E.

After 12:50 hours did not come other reports from scouts and only at 14:30 a Cant.1007 Bis of the 51st Group BT started from Pisa, sighted the enemy ships but was attacked by the “Fulmar” and shot down about 70 miles to the west Cape Corso. The crew, all seriously wounded, was recovered by the DD. "Camicia Nera".[413]

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A Cant. 506 sighted Force H at 12:00 but was equally relentlessly shot down by British fighters. The crew was recovered by TB. "La Masa".

The last sighting though upholding the certainty and immediately caused the takeoff of the bombers ready in the different airports since the morning. A formation of 9 BR.20, of the 43rd Stormo BT sighted Force H 120 km south of Imperia and bombed it, while undergoing a violent anti-aircraft fire, which damaged three twin-engine; a squadron of “Fulmar” rigidly watched the greatest ships of Force H preventing the approach.

There was also a misidentification with dropping bombs on our isolated ships (there were two MAS) SW of La Spezia, by bombers of the 8th Stormo BT and also a convoy of French merchant ships was mistakenly bombarded by SM.79 of the 10th Stormo BT fortunately no particular consequences.

It has been said of the negative mission of 32nd Stormo BT - certainly the most experienced and battle-hardened for naval attacks - forced to return to Decimomannu without having sighted the ships reported earlier by a R.M. scout.

At 18:00 a formation of German 30 Stukas landed in Sarzana after having dropped the explosive load launched into the sea for missed sightings and other aircraft of X CAT including Ju.88 and Bf.110, returned to the base of Sardinia without any result.

These were the disappointing results of the enemy bombardment of Genoa and such command dysfunctions and execution became the chief interpreter of G.S.A who personally stimulated Fleet Command employees and units, to eliminate as soon as symptoms of disorganization encountered, streamlining of bureaucratic procedures and service with greater sense of initiative and resourcefulness operational, especially against those Territorial GUA long time not directly interested in the war employment aspects daily and continuously.

Negative was also judged the Supermarina behavior in relation to the links and instructions provided to the Fleet Command and once again the centrality of operations and want to direct from Rome with the simple assistance of the information a battle at sea, produced those negative results that more sometimes they manifested themselves with interpretive disagreements and dissension among the high command of the Navy and the Naval Admiral Commanding the Battle Fleet.

Between the months of February and March, Sardinia had no other enemy raids, and on 3 April only appeared a shy presence of British carrier based fighters tried to attack a maritime reconnaissance aircraft, one of which, however, was shot down. It was one of the periodic launch missions from aircraft carriers of "Hurricane" for Malta carried out by the "Ark Royal".

Among its new features with the replacement of the units the 8th Stormo BT had been partially replaced by the 51st Group (16th Stormo) with 15 Cant. 1007 Bis, Sqd. 212nd/213th and only the 28th Group remained in Sardinia with 6 SM.79. For the rest it was all remained unchanged except for the 85th Group RM, which had expanded its organic with the 287th Sqd. of Cant.506 deployed at Elmas, necessary to increase the long-range reconnaissance service.

The month of April was, however, a very different trend from previous months elapsed and still and appeared to start from the 7th with the arrival of information of the confirmed starting from Gibraltar of Force H.

It began from that moment "Operation Tiger" destined to ferry supplies to Malta and Alexandria with 5 big steamers, with aboard 238 “I” tanks and 43 dismantled "Hurricane". On the 8th maritime reconnaissance sighted at 10:45 Force H comprising BB. "Renown" and "Queen Elizabeth" with the usual "Ark Royal", 3 cruisers and 9 DD. 37° 35’-7° 25’ in position (height of Cape de Fer in Algeria). Air Force/Sardinia Command immediately sent a SM.79 faster and better armed than Cant. 506, which confirmed the sighting by radio but was then shot down by carrier fighter aircraft.

It was then decided the intervention of the 280th Sqd. AS located at Elmas first, and later the 278th, based in Pantelleria.

The torpedo bomber actions of squadrons 278th and 280th occurred with an attack on enemy naval ships occurred at 13:40 with 3 tri-motors of the 280th.

It was the first contrast launched by the Italian Air Force and that was to herald in "Operation Tiger" designed to strengthen the defense of Malta island and ensure the necessary supplies to survive and resist the attack of the Axis.[414]

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At the same time and according to a proven diversion scheme, came from Alexandria with the escort of the M.F. 6 ships with other supplies to Malta and 2,400 tons of fuel oil needed for future naval needs and in anticipation of assigning the island in addition to the DD group already spread even the cruisers as personally requested by the Prime Minister W. Churchill of Adm. Cunningham.

The offensive opposition to this important enemy action was taken exclusively from the Air Arm, because the Navy did not participate in the conflict with either the Battle Fleet or with insidious means as MAS torpedo boats, submarines and DD., for the action when circumstances were very good operational possibilities as the British feared, especially when crossing the Sicily channel on a full moon nights.

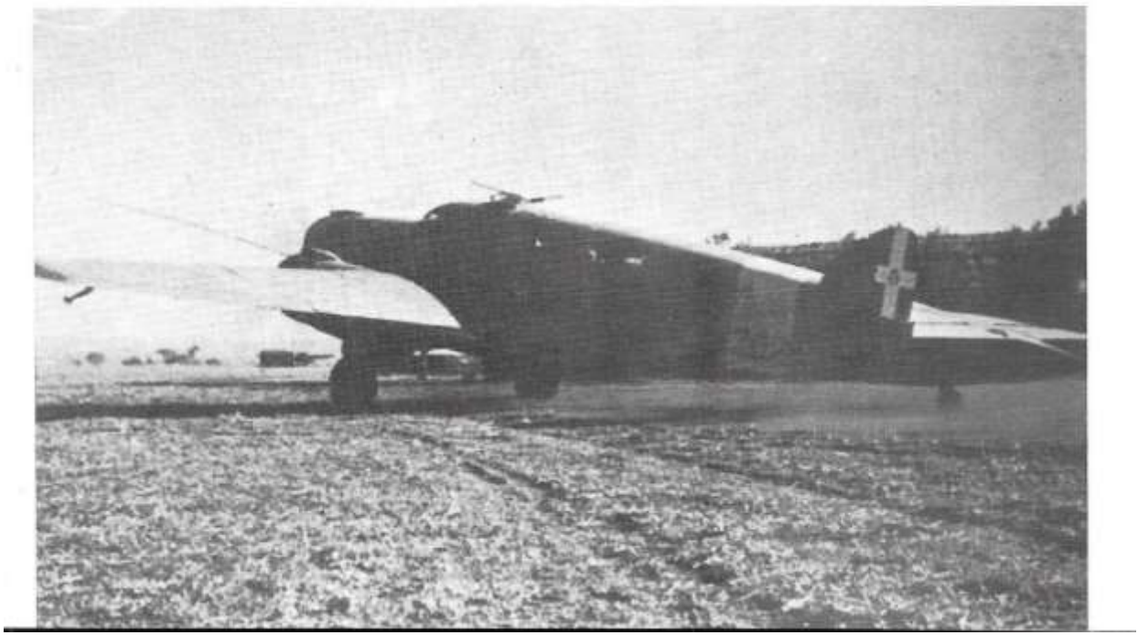
The departure from Gibraltar of Force H occurred on the 5th in the evening, it was as always signaled by our efficient network of informants and so there was plenty of time (56 to 62 hours) to issue the planned event and put alarm the Naval Fleet deployed with the bulk of its units in Taranto and with BB "Caesar" and "Duilio" in Naples.

The torpedo bombers of the 280th Sqd. still stationed at Elmas, took off at 12.00 under the command of crew chiefs Moioli, Magagnoli, Marino Marini/ Rivoli and Cappa escorted by 15 CR.42s of the 3rd CT Aut. Group, and at 13.40 they went to attack the enemy ships welcomed by a barrage of «Fulmars» taking off from the “Ark Royal” and shot down at least 5 of them with their on-board weapons; a very violent anti-aircraft fire found after the barrage of the "Fulmars" was overcome with courage but with heavy losses, including the aircraft of Capt. Marini seriously hit and landed with serious damage near La Galite and that of Second Lieutenant Franco Cappa, who in order not to fail the launch had moved to a minimum distance and was shot down with all his crew (pilot Lieutenant Lamberto Giovagnoli, Lieutenant Marc. Michele Scafa, the airman engineer Antonio Flaminio, the airman Armorer Antonio Luciani). The brave officer was decorated with the M.O.v.m. in memory. They were hit by a torpedo a steamer and a DD of the escort.

At 18:15 they started from Pantelleria 4 torpedo bombers of the 278th Sqd. (Capt. Spezzaferri, Lt. La Guercia, Lt. Capello, Lt. Robone) attacking British ships without being able to appreciate the results.

The latest attack took place in the midnight by the Lt. Robone against a unidentified warship that was definitely hit. In the night a steamer hit a mine of one Italian barriers and sank, another ship was also damaged by mines but reached by its own means the Mediterranean Fleet, who meanwhile had led unscathed to Malta the convoy departed from Alexandria.[415]

Departure of SM 84 of the 282nd Sqd AS from a Sardinian airport for an offensive mission against ships of Force H. The new three-engine SIAI which was to replace the old SM. 79 did not prove technically suitable for use in war.



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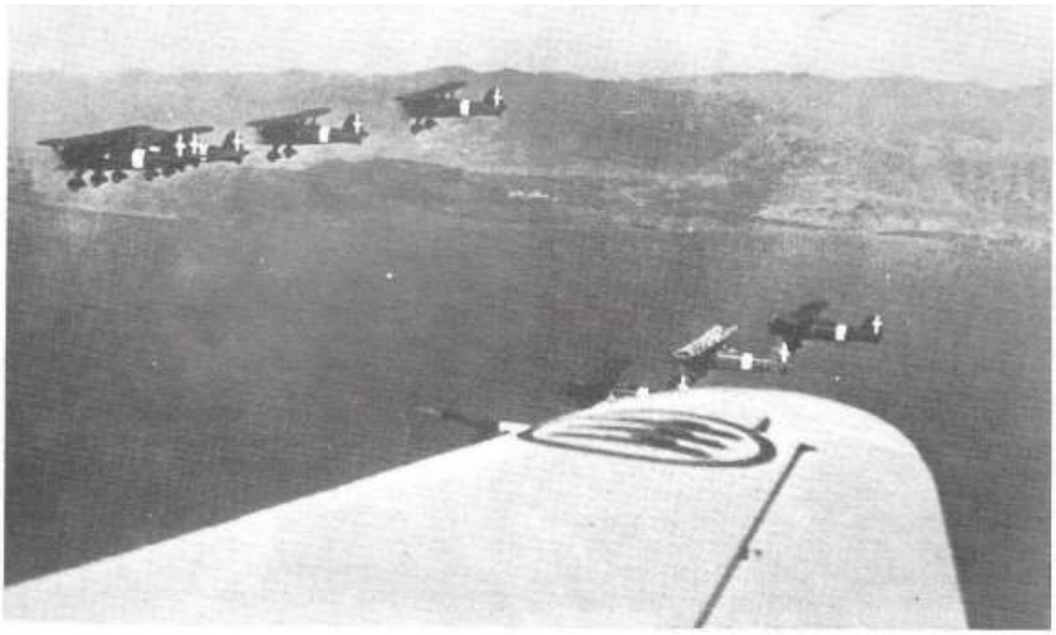

CR. 42 fighter of the 24th Autonomous Group CT. (Lt. Col. Vincenzo Dequal) in flight over the eastern coast of Sardinia to escort bombers directed against an enemy naval formation.

"Operation Tiger" completed with partial results, Force H returned to Gibraltar and the M.F. headed for Alexandria, was made a target while navigating by Aegean torpedo bombers which attack sank another ship. Operation "Tiger" was substantially completed!

For the remaining period of May did not occur in Sardinia major events or enemy raids.

In June, the situation remained too quiet; the deployment of the units had to be enriched by the arrival of the 173rd Sqd. RST to Elmas with the Cant.1007 then destined to Sicily with twin-engine Fiat CR.25, and the newly formed 283rd Sqd. AS under the command of Capt. Giorgio Grossi with 7 tri-motor SM.79 located at Elmas.

Among the fighters intended for Sardinia was the 24th Group Aut. CT (Lt. Col. Vincenzo Dequal) which replaced the 3rd Group CT sent to Libya to the western sector of the 5th Air Fleet.

Two squadrons of the 24th Group the 354th (Capt. Corrado Santoro) and the 370th (Capt. Enrico Candio) they settled in Monserrato while the 355th (Capt. Alberto Brondi) was destined to Alghero.

There had been a qualitative improvement in the material which starred together with some CR.42, MC.200 and G.50 to replace the CR.32.

In the second half of July the supply situation in Malta entered again into crisis and was decided a new operation conventionally called "Substance", by sending six ships coming from England with materials and directly escorted by B.B. "Renown", 3 cruisers, 10 DD. in addition to the usual "Ark Royal"; Malta would have contributed to the protection of the Force H by sending a large group of twin-engine "Beaufighter" up to the limits of autonomy to the island's west.

Our informants in Gibraltar regularly signaled the departure of the "Substance" convoy and Force H but the British Admiralty secretly backed the operation by inserting in the remote night, a second escort group formed by the B.B. “Nelson”, 3 cruisers and 10 DD. detached from the Home Fleet in the Atlantic, which obviously had not been sighted by Italian informants, or at least not identified. The close escort to ships (Force X) included three cruisers and 8 DD.

It was a naval force divided into three distinct and homogeneous groups, one of which direct support with the "Substance" convoy and two operating with 2 B.B., a CV., 6 cruisers, 20 DD. no less than 200,000 tons of military vessels were at sea for escorting more than 50-60,000 tons of merchant ships a massive effort which extolled the commitment and importance that England attached to the refueling operation to strengthen Malta.[416]

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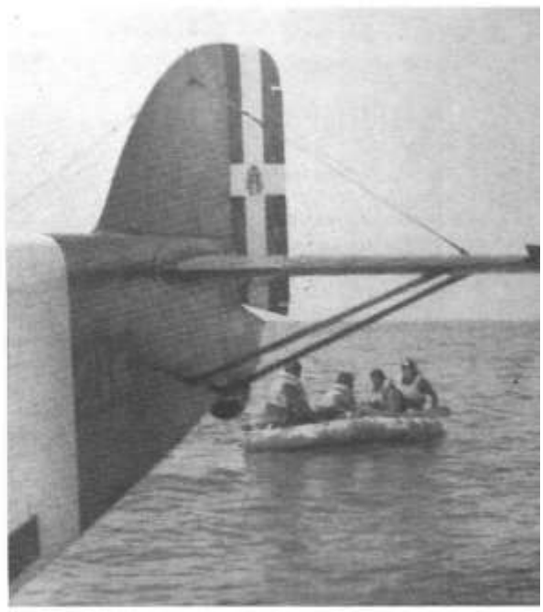
Dramatic sequence of killing the SM 79 of 283rd Sqd AS took place on July 23, 1941 as a result of attacks of Hurricanes and Defiants of the CV "Ark Royal". Lt. Alfredo Dolfuss on wing covered by water the specialists remained on board. (Photo Royal Navy)

The sailors of the DD. "Foresight" photograph Italians aviators. They notice Lt. Dolfuss, Sgt. De Vanna and Av. Sc Marc. Giulio Zanichelli visibly hurt and who will die later for reported injuries in combat with enemy fighters (Photo Royal Navy)

Four crew members 1st Av Mot. Vacca Silla, Sc Av Fot. Cantisani Mario, Sc Av Arm. Rubino Pietro and Sgt. pilot. Vanna De Amedeo rescue with a life raft go to the wing to save the Li. Dolfuss linger to disposable of codes (Photo Royal Navy)



On July 22 maritime reconnaissance sighted a south of Mallorca an operational group and gave the alarm. The Supreme Command questioned Supermarina to know the thought, they were informed that it had to be a normal operation to supply Malta with aircraft launched from aircraft carriers, but at the same time, to avoid unpleasant surprises, was alerted to the Battle Fleet with B.B. "Littorio", "Vittorio Veneto" and the "Duilio" (Taranto), 7 cruisers between heavy and light (in Naples/Messina).

On 23 July, the survey also sighted the "Substance" convoy and the operation is clarified in part because the second operating group had not yet seen and nothing foreshadowed that it would have been then, considering the identical composition of the first that could easily cause identification misunderstandings.

The sighting was again judged late by Supermarina to make timely movements of the Battle Fleet, and once again the contrast to the enemy was assigned to the Air Force full responsibility.

In the same day of the 22nd the British ships were attacked by the Air Force/Sardinia and the next day also by torpedo bombers of Sicily.

July 22 took off 8 torpedo bombers, 15 bombers and 7 with fighter escort departing between 15:30 to 16:00, but unfortunately the naval formation was probably not sighted for signaling error on projected coordinates, and all aircraft were departing Sardinia after more than 3 hours of sailing.

The 23rd take off 2 SM.79 patrols of the 283rd with the crews: Grossi, Barioglio, Dolfuss (patrol) Pandolfi, Di Bella, Cipriani (second patrol) reinforced by a section of the 280th Sqd. with Moioli and Anselmi. The departure took place almost simultaneously at 08:20 take-off of 15 SM.79 of the 32nd Stormo BT and 5 Cant.1007 Bis of the 51st BT Group.

With more precise indications, the patrols of torpedo bombers sighted at 09:42 enemy ships and making the attack, while the "Ark Royal" threw her well-trained "Fulmar" to repel the danger posed by the fearsome Italian torpedo bombers, who were inexorably diverted from the attacks conducted by embarked fighters which unceasingly also attacked the bombers at altitude knocking down a SM.79 of the 32nd Stormo. [417]

In the spring of 1941 the 130th Autonomous Group AS (Maj Giorgio Grossi) was stationed in Sardinia with the 280th and 283rd Sqd. with MS. 79 and based on airfields of Cagliari and Decimomannu. The camp Mass for the 280th Sqd AS staff.

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However, a "Fulmar" paid for its impetuosity by crashing under the precise bursts of a torpedo bomber of the 283rd fired by the 1st Av. Sforzini. The other patrol of the 283rd was more fortunate with the torpedoing of a large steamer by Lt. Cipriani, of a "Manchester" type cruiser hit by Pandolfi and another steamer attacked and hit by Lt. Di Bella.

Lt. Cipriani's tri-motor suffered the removal of an engine due to an anti-aircraft shell and was forced to make an emergency landing. The crew was captured a few hours later by the DD «Avon Vale ».

In the afternoon a new attack of the 283rd with the crew chiefs: Forni, Barioglio, Dolfuss, Cipriani escorted this time by 20 G.50 of the 24th Group CT, whose pilots inexperienced at navigation of the sea, quickly lost touch for strong haze. At 17:40 was sighted Force H, and soon the SM.79 were attacked by a swarm of fighters that struck the plane of the Lt. Dolfuss who with wounded on board one of whom later died, was forced to set down at sea and the whose crew was captured shortly after by DD "Foresight". Two enemy fighters were shot down by torpedo bombers (1st Aviere Baldini -Av. Sc. Arm. Paganini) but among the crews, there were 5 wounded. In return also the tri-motor of Lt. Cipriani was forced to ditch for extensive injuries and the crew rescue came later from a flying boat of the 613th Sqd./S and taken to Elmas.

At 17:30 another attack was carried out by 3 SM.79 of the 208th - Moioli, Rivoli and Setti - which launched their torpedoes short distance from three enemy ships with a strong sign of fire reaction.

The day was completed, as already mentioned, by a 14 bomber attack of the 32nd Stormo BT escorted by 17 CR.42, bombarding the enemy ships from a altitude of 1100 m. while undergoing the fighter attack one of which was shot down by the escort. An aircraft could with bold maneuver to drop on the aircraft carrier alone 300 meters of altitude narrowly missing the target. A good 11 aircraft affected by the A/A fire. The last attack of the grueling day of battle was led by SM.79 of 28th Group BT escorted by fighters, but the strong anti-aircraft fire and the intervention of the fearsome fighters of the "Ark Royal" made the bombing inaccurate.

The Air Force-Sardinia had completed its task at the end of the hard day of 23 hours and the next day would be the turn of Air Force Sicily-even as early in the evening there was a torpedo attack of the 278th departing from Pantelleria .

Participating in the attack of 4 SM.79 of the 278th Sqd. escorted by 7 CR.42 at whose command was Capt. Magagnoli replacing Capt. Erasi had, with the crew leaders Robone, Capello, Spezzaferri. Capt. Magagnoli sank a steamer, others attacked the escort ships. The CR.42 detached from the 23rd Group CT striking down a "Fulmar" who along with other fighters tried to counter the offensive action.

On the 24th, an isolated SM.79 under the command of Capt. Spezzaferri attacked a steamer of about 12,000 tons at around 09:40 hours, also managing to disengage from a "Blenheim" that was escorting the ship. In the late morning and afternoon, other torpedo bombers of the 278th attacking ships damaging yet another steamer.

Operation «Substance» cost the English the sinking of the DD «Fearless», the damage of other warships and merchant ships, considerably reducing with greater objectivity and verification, the primitive declarations made by the crews whose results seemed much more evident than they actually were. Once again the temerity of the British Navy had overcome every difficulty obtaining the purpose that Operation «Substance» presupposed the supply of Malta!

Among the SM.79 of the 32nd Stormo BT also they included as two bombers of great autonomy SM.82 as "Armed" (equipped with guided bomb, gondola pointing, targeting milestone) given in charge to the 49th Sqd. which employed them against Gibraltar in night missions carried out on 5 and 12 June and on 11, 13 and 14 July.

The aircraft SM.82/B was able to carry 1000 kg bombs (4, 250 kg) with a flight of 8 hours and 30 minutes at a distance of 2700 km between roundtrip, from Decimomannu in Gibraltar. At the end of July to coincide with the alternation of the 32nd Stormo BT with the 36th torpedo bombers, the armed SM.82 were returned to command of the 3rd Air Fleet for further use in other areas.

The raids on Gibraltar had caused alarmism and damage and forced the British command to adopt new defensive measures.[418]

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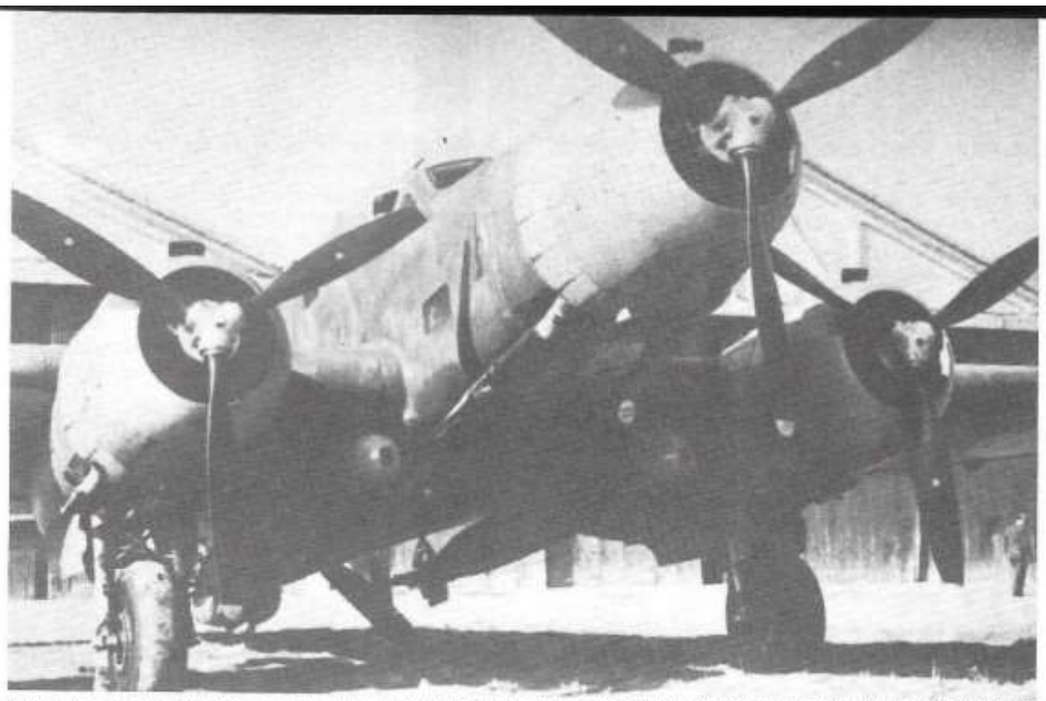

In July, replacing the tried 32nd Stormo was sent to Sardinia the 36th Stormo Torpedo Bombers (Col. Helmut Seidl). The first Italian unit at the level of Stormo consisting of the new specialty; the 36th Stormo AS was equipped with new production SM 84.

The penultimate day of July RAF-Malta bombers attacked Cagliari in the evening causing modest damage, since the intervention of interceptor fighters forced British pilots to quickly drop their load of bombs.

The defense of Sardinia had been improved with the establishment of a night fighter section of CR.42 assigned to Montserrat employed by the 24th Group Aut. CT, which had now also some Macchi C.200.

In August occurred a sporadic attack by incendiary bombs on the Tempio area that caused some casualties at the hands of an isolated "Ark Royal" bomber in charge of a diversionary mission, and a bombing of Cagliari the 27th, whose defense shot down an English embarked aircraft type. On the evening of the 27th embarked fighters machine-gunned the airport-seaplane of Elmas damaging a dozen Cant.501/506 at anchor and causing some injuries.

The next day Elmas was again strafed with some Cant.501 seaplanes and SM.79 slightly damaged.

It was the first sign of the new operation started by Force H Adm. Somerville to get to Malta supplies with fast minelayer “Manxman”.

The 280th Sqd. had been for a few days given to the command of Capt. Franco Melley and two torpedo planes of this squadron to start attacks on British ships – pilots Melley and Giacopinelli -which were particularly unfortunate because the torpedoes launched failed to achieve positive results (one hit a ship but did not explode). At 16:25 the another two torpedo planes - Setti of the 280th and Donà delle Rose of the 283rd - attacked north of Cape Bougaroni with a torpedo hitting a warship paid dearly with the shooting down in flames of the SM.79 of 2nd Lt. Pietro Donà delle Rose, who died with all hands.

The 28th another two crews of the 280th - Di Bella and Bucci - they searched for survivors but was only found the body of Lt. Observer Antonio Forni later recovered by a submarine.

They were decorated by M.O.v.m. in memory 2nd Lt. Pietro Donà delle Rose and Lt. Observer Antonio Forni.[419]

During the month of September the two aircraft carriers "Ark Royal" and "Furious" launched in the direction of Malta and 350 miles away, 49 "Hurricane" with the goal to reinforce the island’s RAF.

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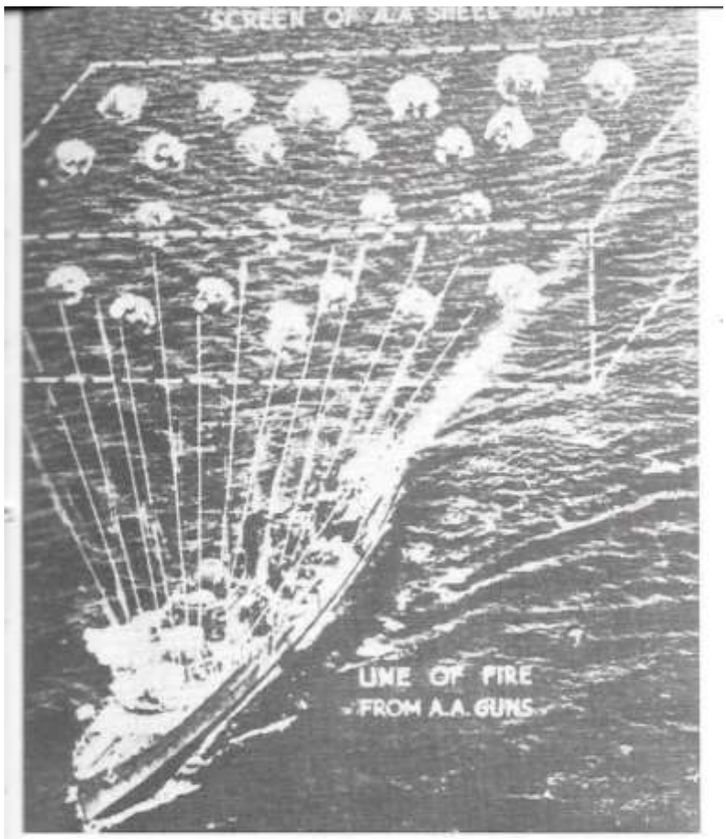


Vertical defensive scheme to "parallel piped" of the anti-aircraft barrage of a English battleship shooting. A clear and eloquent demonstration of the danger they were Italians torpedo bombers in attacks on ships of the MF.

In September, with the reunification of the two existing Autonomous Sqd. - 280th and 283rd - it was set up the 130th Group Aut. Torpedo Bombers based at Elmas in command of the newly promoted Maj. Giorgio Grossi.

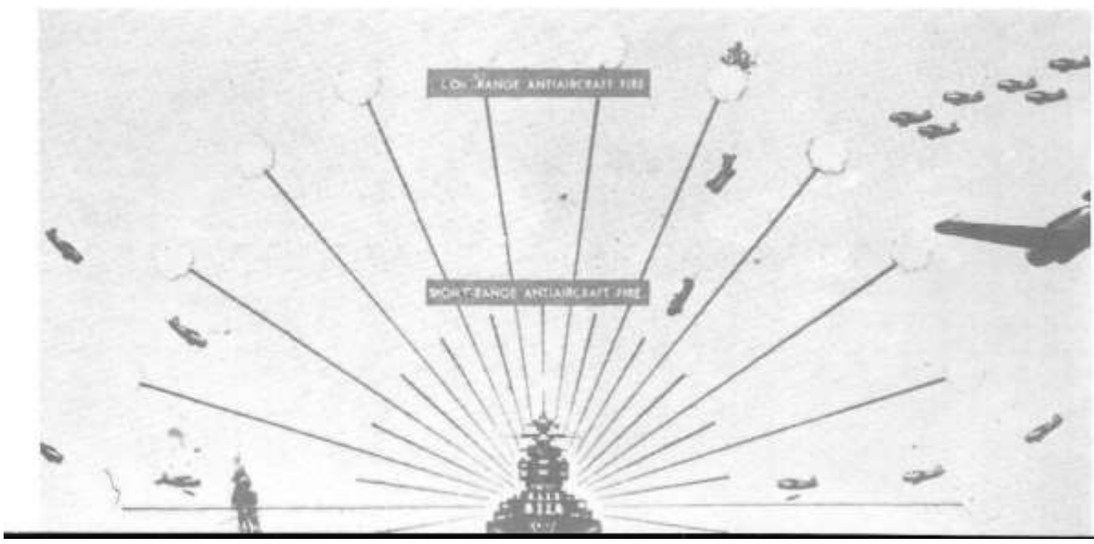
The 32nd Stormo BT, a veteran unit of the Air Force - Sardinia, had been alternated in the territory of the 2nd Air Fleet for reconstitution and had been replaced in Decimomannu by the newly formed 36th Stormo Torpedo Bombers from Bologna, with a mixed facility of SM.79 and SM.84 for a total of 33 tri-motor available, of which only 60% efficient.

Thus the Air Force/Sardinia possessed now of only one group of bombers at high altitude and three groups of torpedo bombers that had been given to units of the island a particularly offensive aspect that is well suited to the particular use that the Naval Air Force- Sardinia had assumed since the early days of 1941.

The 36th Stormo AS under the command of Col. Helmut Seidl was divided onto the 108th Group (Maj. Arduino Buri) with 256th Sqd. - Capt. Carlo Susinno then Capt. Vincenzo Caramelli and 257th - Capt. Alfonso Rotolo and with the 109th Group (Lt. Col. Carlo Gussoni then Maj. Mario Turba) with Sqd. 258th (Capt. Calcedonio Baculo then Capt. Bartolomeo Tomasino) and 259th (Capt. Giusellino Verna).

The presence in Sardinia of a strong component of torpedo planes with over 40 between SM.79 and SM.84, had been wanted by the Supreme Command with the understanding of Superaereo, the aim of halting or limiting to the highest degree, the penetration into the central Mediterranean of enemy Naval Forces in the strategic plan to compensate with such an offensive force, due to the lack of airpower derived from the departure of X CAT.[420]

Defensive scheme of an English ship battle with anti-aircraft barrage of short and long range. A deadly display of fire obtained with the use of 8 102/50 cannons, 32 machine guns 40/56 and 26 to 20/45 quadruple. ("Warspite" type BB.)



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The diminished presence in Sicily of torpedo bombers units was compensated for in part by the Dive Bomber Group with Ju.87 and the high level bomber Stormo.

It was thought in this way to cause the most damage to the first enemy ships with torpedo bombers of Sardinia and then continue the offensive action with units of Sicily.

These action concepts were translated into employment directives issued by Superaereo for employee commands, thus described:

a) spot and recognize as far away as possible enemy Naval Forces to be able to interpret the movements and the purpose of the actions;

b) attack enemy ships with the mass of torpedo planes and bombers of all kinds, being intended essentially to the warships;

c) reduced the efficiency of enemy Naval Forces, it will be easier to destroy merchant ships with the intervention of national Naval Forces;

d) the various missions in the presence of the aircraft carrier, must be carried out with the protection of fighter aircraft that will even provide the escort to national Naval Forces.

Proved all too evident in those directives, that aviation was required to deal with only the available forces, the entire opponent's defensive reaction developed with its ships, its airplanes, the terrifying anti-aircraft fire, and that the orthodox execution these directives, inevitably entailed a great sacrifice of crews and aircraft.

Again the Air Force was assumed, in terms of history, the great responsibility of attempting to block, only with the ability to act and availability - moral and materials -the British Navy in the Mediterranean.

On September 25, the new enemy supply operation to Malta code named "Halberd". Once again, the English adopted the method of fragmented and homogeneous operational groups, in an attempt to deceive Italian informants and cause misinterpretations by the command on the number, type and composition of the Armed Forces sent to counter the operation.[421]

The crew of a SM. 79 torpedo bomber posing in front of the their aircraft, youthful and smiling faces of specialists who will soon face the enemy fearlessly in a hellish anti-aircraft barrage

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Under the olive trees of Sardinia remaining G. 50s of the 24th Group CT. In the long battle against the enemy naval power, even the fighters faced the perils of navigation on the sea, the embarked fighters attacks and shooting of guns aboard ship.

A first naval group from England entered the Mediterranean on September 25 (BB. “Prince of Wales”, 4 CR. 10 DD, 14 steamers) and at the same time the BB. “Nelson” pretended to leave for the Atlantic with 3 DD. to then return to the Mediterranean during the night and join the BB. “Rodney”, waiting with the CV “Ark Royal “, one CL. and 8 DD. of Force H.

Thus were formed two operating groups: a more advanced with "Nelson", "Ark Royal", CL "Hermione," and 6 DD. one further back with "Prince of Wales", "Rodney" 4 cruisers, 12 DD. escorting remotely the "Halberd" convoy with nine steamers and DDs as close escort.

The aerial escort included 60 fighters, reconnaissance, torpedo planes of the FAA embarked on aircraft carriers, 19 catapult aircraft embarked on the BBs. and cruisers for a total of 79 fleet aircraft. The RAF-Malta would have contributed to "Halberd” with deep sea land based scouts "Sunderland" and "Maryland" to know the situation between 12° and 5° longitude, and an air force remote intervention constituted with “Beaufighter”/“Blenheim” and "Hurricane" as close escort.

In total, between 120 and 130 enemy aircraft were included in the "Halberd".

Additional information of the departure from Gibraltar of English Naval Forces, Superaereo issued their service provisions and strengthened torpedo bombers of Sardinia with 5 other aircraft provided by 278th and 282nd Sqd. of Sicily.

Supermarina this time quickly became aware of the situation that was looming and ordered the preparation of the 9th Div. Naval “(“Littorio" - "Veneto", the 3rd and 8th with 5 cruisers and the 10th, 13th, 14th, 16th DD Sqds. with 14 fleet destroyers and the direct and indirect support of 16 submarines suitably located in the western Mediterranean basin.

The Air Force-Sardinia was available with 26 torpedo bombers escorted by 30 MC.200 efficient and 20 CR.42; that of Sicily with 9 Stukas, 24 bombers at high altitude, 3 torpedo bombers, 18 fighters to escort the multi-engine-dive bombers, consistent share of scouts to keep the situation under control.

A total of 130-140 Italian airplanes were available to counter the "Halberd”.

On the morning of the 26th our industrious and intelligent informants in Gibraltar, also pointed to the passage of the "Nelson” into the Mediterranean and that stratagem adopted by Somerville was largely canceled.[422]

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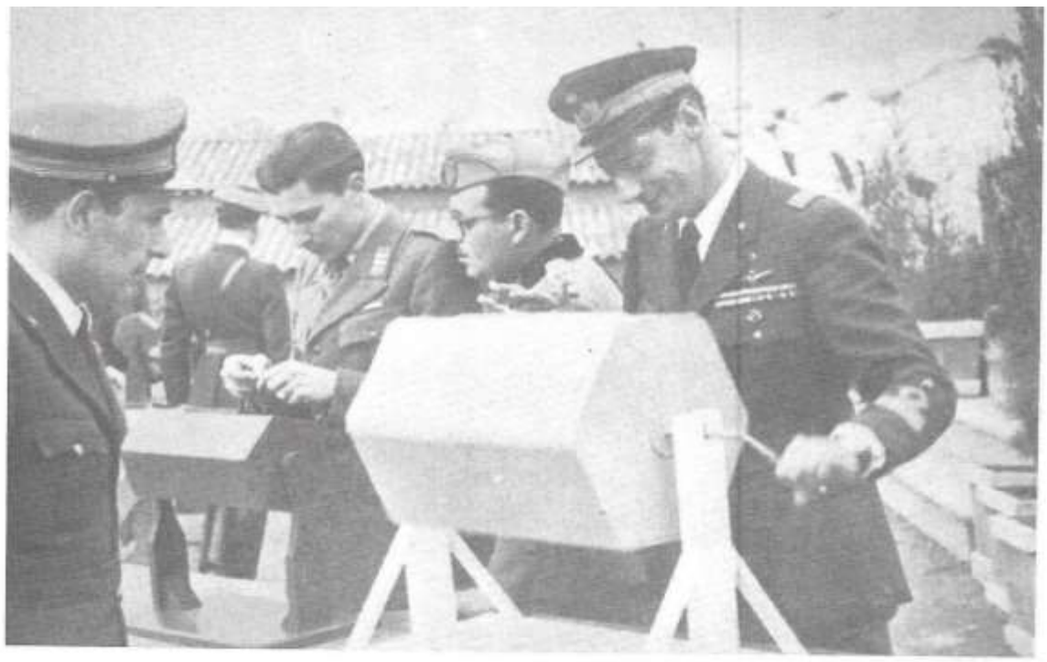

Maj GDP. Arduino Puri commander 108th Group AS that torpedoed the BB "Nelson" on July 27, 1941. A peaceful interlude for aviators of the 36th Stormo AS sorely tried by the war at sea.

The 26th, was more precise navigation direction of the enemy and rejected the hypothesis of a attack in the Gulf of Liguria, with the consequent shift of focus to the south by the Italian command.

At 15:30 the scouts of Sardinia (2 Cant.l007 Bis of the 51st Group BT) caught sight of the enemy ships located at 37° 20' Lat./5° 05' Long. (North of Cape Matifou).

Three torpedo bombers of the 282nd Sqd. (Marilli, Cristiani, Mayer) and two of the 278th (Bucceri and Venturini) were transferred as planned to Sardinia from Elmas to better cope with the situation, while Superaereo guaranteed the necessary bases to Naval Squadron moving from Ciampino to Montserrat 31 MC.200 of the 52nd Stormo CT.[423]

Bologna / Borgo Panigale - The flag of the 36th Stormo AS (Col. Donalello Gabrielli) is decorated M.O.vm for valuable historic achievements of its crews during 1941. A fair and well-deserved recognition of valor.

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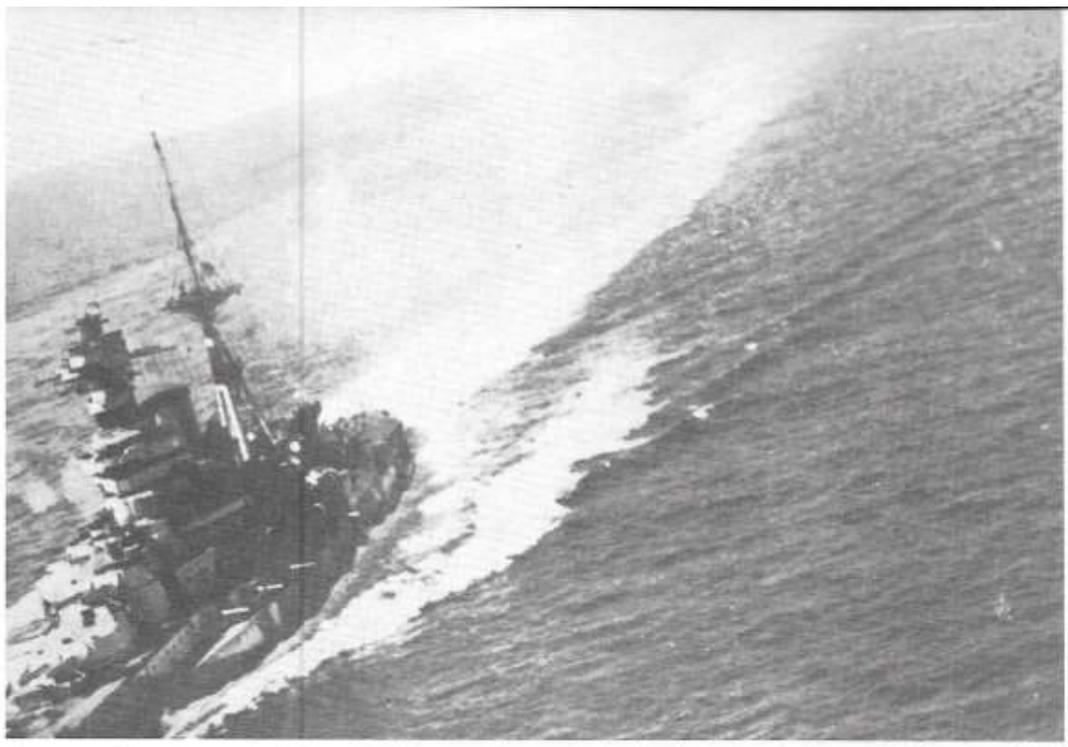

The B.B. "Nelson" photographed at low altitude by an Italian torpedo bomber that had recklessly torpedoed the powerful enemy battleship the episode aroused the admiration of the same enemy.

The 27th at 08:15, a scout pointed at the point 37° 45'/7° 45' Force H, followed later from another sighting at 37° 50'/8° 55' (west of La Galite) 100 miles south of Cape Spartivento Sardo.

Took off at 11:50 from Elmas 130th Group AS with 14 tri-motor provided by Sqd. 278th, 280th and 282nd with crew leaders: Grossi, Cipriani, Focacci, Di Bella, Barioglio, Melley, Setti, Giacopinellì, Deslex, Marino Marini, Cristiani, Venturini and Bucceri.

The escort was provided by CR.42 of the 24th Group CT.

The tasks were divided among the patrols and the formation expanded to refine the search in light of the atmospheric variability with low clouds, haze and large clear stretches with excellent visibility.

The sighting took place at 13:15 and the patrols were sharing the attack vectors: one from the north, one from the south, one from west to north.

Torpedo bombers of Marini and Cristiani struck a cruiser and one of Lt. Venturini a unspecified warship. An embarked fighter was shot down, having wounded some members of Lt. Mayer's crew, while a "Beaufighter" attacked Lt. Venturini's tri-motor for about 20 minutes, killing the radio operator, Av. Antonio Cilla.

Torpedo bombers of Bucceri, Setti, Melley and Giacopinelli thought they had hit at least 2 cruisers and as many DDs.

The SM.79 with Lt. Deslex who took with the decision to attack the “Ark Royal” flying very low over the water was hit by a cannon and disappeared into the sea.

The patrol of Maj. Grossi sighted by “Fulmar”, was actively addressed and attacked with vehemence to the point that had to tack without executing a drop and chased until Elmas by enemy fighters who also carried out a strafing of the airfield.

At 12:15 took off from Decimomannu also the 36th Stormo AS with 11 tri-motor divided into two patrols - one under the command of Col. Seidl and the other of Maj. Buri, escorted by fighters of the 24th Group CT.

At 12:59 the fighters of the 354th Sqd. (Capt. Corrado Santoro) foiled an attack by “Fulmars” on the SM.84s of the 1080th AS Group and two “Fulmars” were shot down while the tri-motor of Capt. Rotolo, commander of the 257th Sqd., crashed, hit by anti-aircraft fire which, with the sudden skid, also hit the right wingman, Lt. Barro, fatally involving him in the fall.[424]

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The tri-motor of S. Lt. Morelli also crashed, shot down by the embarked fighters, but Maj. Buri followed by his wingmen Lt. Rossi and Amante quickly launched themselves against the "Nelson" at very low altitude, managing to hit its bow.

The SM.84 in route of escape were chased furiously by "Fulmar" and machine-gunned for several minutes, but managed to face bravely the attack with the killing of two fighters.

The 109th Group with Col. Seidl who had done one lap off to attack from the south, was surprised with no escort by a strong unit of "Fulmar" fighters in quick succession felled three torpedo planes including the Stormo Commander and commander of the 258th Sqd. Capt. Tomasmo.

The Torpedo Bombers of the 36th Stormo lost in just one mission and its first action, 6 crew, including the commander of Stormo and three of the Squadrons, 23 crew members which are to be added the 5 men of the tri-motor of Lt. Deslex Carlo.

To the banner of the 36th Stormo AS was granted the M.O.v .m. and the same decoration was granted to the memory of Col. Helmut Seidl, and to Capt. Alfonso Rotolo, Bartolomeo Tomasino, Giusellino Verna.

Also decorated with M.O.v.m. were Naval Sub. Lt Giuseppe Majorana (in memory) and S. Lt. pilot Giovanni Del Vento of the 287th Sqd. RM, who they had followed with their Cant.506 the movements of the Force H until such time as the flying boat was attacked and shot down by aircraft carriers fighter. Died Lt. (Jg) Majorana observer while the survivors remained 17 hours in the water before being spotted and rescued by a flying boat.

Admirable was also the sacrifice of Sgt. Luigi Valotti of the 24th Group CT, which in the generous attempt to divert the attention of the British artillerymen from the torpedo planes attacking in the zone, he began: the sky of the battle a series of aerobatic maneuvers with his CR.42 which had the effect of divert, albeit briefly as stated Adm. Somerville, the attention and interest of the sailors, a diversion which continued up to the time in which plummeted into the sea generously sacrificed unselfishly his young life.

In the evening 130th Group AS returned again to the attack with 5 SM.79 under the command of Major Grossi and torpedoes were launched against some cruisers but without ascertaining the outcome of the attacks because of the intense A/A shooting which damaged some aircraft.

The next day attack of torpedo bombers of the 278th Sqd. took off from Pantelleria, sinking the steamer "Imperial Star" of 12,400 tons.

Aviation escort to Naval Forces remained pending clarification of the situation to the S.E. of Cape Carbonara, the Air Force Command-Sicily sent at 14:30 of the 27th three fighter groups, respectively 9 CR.42, 8 CR.42 and 3 Re.2000, in addition to 16 MC.200 sent by the Air Force-Sardinia Command, but only 5 pilots could find the Italian ships which in the meantime had moved further north to Sardinia by 30 miles, and on top of the fighter formation was made the target of strong A/A fire of the Italian ships felling a CR.42.

The second formation of CR.42 come later, not sighted the ships who moved meanwhile 50 miles to NE, and had to return to Sicily and only 3 Re.2000 because of their increased autonomy, could play a short period of escort on Naval Forces before landing in Montserrat due to the end of their autonomy.

On the 28th Superaereo decided to strengthen the component of torpedo bombers of Sicily by sending to Gerbini 6 tri-motors of the 130th Group AS, assuming that penetration of the enemy ships in the Strait of Sicily would have facilitated the offensive attacks starting from Sicily.

In the afternoon Supermarina ordered the return to the base of the Naval Forces that had been waiting in the waters to the east of Sardinia, and the transaction is concluded albeit with residual reconnaissance missions carried out by torpedo bombers, but remained largely devoid of results.

The bulk of "Halberd" convoy reached Malta on the 28th, arriving with modest losses, the conditions that the operation was intended to accomplish.

In line with expectations the Air Force had to once again endure fully the sacrifices imposed by "Halberd", with the loss of 21 aircraft of all types, the death of 51 pilots (many of them missing), and among these some 33 belonging to torpedo bombers units. Six wounded of almost all specialists of torpedo bombers crews.[425]

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The "Nelson" was six months in the yards with the serious damage, 9 embarked fighter were shot down and among them a “Fulmar” mistakenly hit by A/A fire of the "Rodney."

The heavy losses suffered by the Air Force were due to orthodox observance of the directives of the Supreme Command, which established the priority to attack the warships to isolate, it was assumed, the merchant vessels and to favor the action of Naval Forces.

This concept of use entirely theoretical proved illusory because the Air Force, knowing consciously sacrifice was not able to perform to the means available and the possibilities they offered, destruction or complete neutralization of the great battleships aircraft carriers and heavily defended by anti-aircraft fire, when one considers that the only “Nelson”, provided for A/A the fire of 6 pieces 102-50, 48 Pom-Pom guns, 40mm multiple barrel, 30 machine guns 20 mm and the "Ark Royal" of 16 A/A guns of 114/45, 48 machine guns, 40 mm, 32 20 mm machine guns and a “Fulmar” fighter component greater than the total number of torpedo bombers sent to attack the Force H (between 25 SM.79/SM.84).

No less than 300 guns were in operation to block and destroy any enemy aircraft appeared in a range of 3-5000 meters from the ships.

What it was done in the two days of the battle, although lower than the efforts and the sacrifices suffered, could be sufficient to obtain the arrest and interdiction concept theorized by the Supreme Command, but it was supported and substantiated as required by the directive of the Chief of the G.S.G, the intervention of the Navy, participation which in fact did not occur.

To this add after the countless extant dysfunctions in terms of aerial-naval cooperation, radio communication difficulties and delays in the transmission of news and information to various commands involved, the lack of speech transceivers aboard the fighter aircraft, the poor preparation for navigation on the sea of the fighter pilots and the lack of specific training of fighter pilots to escort torpedo planes, the limited autonomy of the aircraft, inadequate weaponry. A number of important elements that the Supreme Command was certainly know to plan interventions and issue directives. In October, occurred a raid on Elmas on the 17th with modest damage to equipment and flight material and in the same day, two torpedo bombers of the 130th Group AS piloted by Maj. Grossi and Lt. Borgatti, attacked unsuccessfully for malfunctioning torpedoes, a merchant ship off the Algerian coast. The 23rd new attack of 2 SM.84 of the 36th Stormo AS on steamers camouflaged with French insignia which avoided the torpedoes and opened A/A fire damaging one of the tri-motors. They participated in the attack also 3 Cant.1007 Bis of the 51st Group Aut. BT.

New action for the 24th with 3 airplanes of 130th Group (Melley, Caresio, Focacci) attacking a steamboat near La Gali who was hit and sunk by Lt. Focacci (ship "Empire Guillemot” 7520 TSL.). In the afternoon attack on another ship escorted by "Hurricane" by two SM.79 of the 282nd took off from Sicily. The ship was hit despite the intervention of the fighters who chased for some distance the two torpedo planes.

On 12 November two crews of the 282nd (Lt. Marino Marini and Cristiani) performed a test launch in the Grand Harbour of 2 F.F.F. bombs ([Colonel] Freri – [Captain] Fiore – [Colonel] Filpa) of 1000 kg called a motorized-bomb operating in water like torpedoes with spiral motion recently adopted special-purpose at ports or at sea convoys with calm seas.

The first action of the Air Forc/Sardinia in November was recorded on the 14th with the attack of two torpedo bombers of 130th Group AS (Grossi and Barioglio) to a isolated steamer (“Empire Pelican" 6463 TSL) who was struck by a torpedo of Lt. Barioglio and sank rapidly. The other torpedo sank after a short run, and this new added inconvenience to reported earlier caused the opening of an investigation to ascertain the many failures to torpedoes and particularly to those produced by the Silurificio Italiano di Baia.

On the 15th another steamer abscising the use of the French flag, was spotted and attacked by two SM. 84 of the 36th Stormo AS and sunk by Maj. Buri near La Galite (“Empire Defender" 5,649 TSL).[426]

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In November torpedo aircraft of the 130th Group and the 36th Stormo AS were moved for short operating periods between Sicily and Libya, gradually returning home between early December and the middle of the same month. On December 22, two SM. 84 of the 258th Sqd. AS attacked and sank a steamer near La Galite.

The last month of 1941 did not record any offensive mission of the enemy on Sardinia whereas the few raids that emerged during the year were made primarily from embarked aviation aircraft and almost always coinciding with interesting Naval Operations of Force H.

WAR ACTIVITY
(Period 10 June 1940 – 31 Dec. 1941)

Bombing –Torpedo Bombing	*1940*	*1941*	*Total*
Missions carried out	495	346	841
Flight hours	1,030	1,730	2,760
Aircraft employed	3,489	1,1160	4,649
Amount of explosives launched	431,286 kg.	86,000 kg.	517286 kg.
Aircraft lost in action	31	20	51
Stricken aircraft for destruction -accident	23	12	35
Enemy Aircraft downed	7	12	19
Torpedoes	-	25	25
Strategic reconnaissance			
Missions performed	-	188	188
Flight hours	-	630	630
Aircraft used	-	192	192
Aircraft lost in action	-	3	3
Stricken aircraft for destruction -accident	-	2	2
Enemy Aircraft downed	-	1	1
Amount of explosives launched	-	4,200	4,200
Fighters			
Missions performed	412	840	1,252
Flight hours	628	1,020	1,648
Airplanes operated	715	2,860	3,575
Stricken aircraft for destruction -accident	11	11	22
Aircraft lost in action	4	5	9
Enemy aircraft shot down	5	14	19

DECEASED STAFF

	1940	1941
Officers	11	31
NCOs	8	39
Graduated specialists	12	48
Airmen	12	4
Injured	16	26[427]

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SUMMARY	
Missions performed	n. 2,281
Flight hours	n. 5,038
Aircraft used	n. 8,456
Aircraft lost	n. 63
Downed aircraft	n. 39
Stricken aircraft for damage / accident	n. 59
Bombs launched	521,486 kg
Torpedoes	n. 25

Telegram of greeting and good wishes for the New Year 1942 in the original (German) sent by Field Marshal Kesselring to the Chief of the G.S/RA Gen. Fougier (A.C.S.)

Keßelring
Generalfeldmarschall

Gefechtsstand, den 31. 12. 41.

Exzellenz !

Alte Waffenbrüderschaft, die an 2 Fronten gehärtet, zwingt mich, Ihnen, Exzellenz und Ihrer herrlichen Luftwaffe für das schicksalhafte Jahr 1942 das Allerbeste zu wünschen. Meine Luftflotte und ich sind stolz, Schulter an Schulter mit Ihren Kräften zusammen arbeiten und kämpfen zu dürfen. Ich hoffe, dass diese innige Waffenbrüderschaft die tiefen Gefühle unserer beiden Waffen noch vertiefen lässt.

Heil und Sieg Ihrer Luftwaffe für's kommende Jahr !

Ihnen, Exzellenz, gelten mit Ihrer Familie meine persönlichen Wünsche !

In treuer Waffenbrüderschaft bin ich

stets Ihr sehr ergebener

Kesselring.

Kesselring command post, 31 December 41.
General Field Marshal
Your Excellency!
Old brotherhood in arms, hardened on two fronts, compels me to wish you, Your Excellency, and your magnificent Air Force all the best for the fateful year of 1942. My Air Force and I are proud to be able to work shoulder to shoulder with your vigor and fight. I hope that this close brothership in arms will deepen the deep feelings of our two services.
Salvation and victory of your Luftwaffe for the coming year!
To you, Your Excellency, my family wishes are my personal desires!
In faithful arms of arms, I am always very devoted.[428]

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CHAPTER SIX

The Italian Air Force on the Eastern front - U.S.S.R. Aviation of the C.S.I.R.

The premise of the attack on the USSR -The C.S.I.R. - The Italian air force in Russia - The war operations - The Russian winter war.[429]

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CHAPTER SIX

The Italian Air Force on the Eastern front -U. S.S.R.
Aviation of C.S.I.R.

Among the secret clauses of the amazing German-Soviet agreement of 1939, Treaty bargain which was the prelude to the outbreak of the Second World War and the partition of Poland, there were specified and well specified certain spheres of territorial influence, that each of the contractors undertook to respect each other, in order to avoid friction, resentment and disequilibration in forms of political opportunities, strategic and military.

Diplomats and military successes of Germany, the establishment of the Tripartite Pact and adherence to the Axis of most of the Balkan nations, however, had represented for the Soviet Union as many fears and concerns prompting the General Staff of the Red Army the adoption of certain "safety measures", which were nothing more than the usual and consolidated aspects of traditional annexationist policy of Russia, performed in more unscrupulously on occasions, with serious injury to world peace and, consequently, the occurrence of identical concerns and concerns with the adoption of similar "security measures" on the part of the Reich.

The occupation by the USSR of Bukovina and Bessarabia to the detriment of Romania, had been the first warning signal for the Reich, which at the time while advising caution and confidence to Romanians, had decided to apply certain hard milestones not to be exceeded the established waiting policy of the Fuhrer, beyond which, Germany, would deemed automatically released formally from the observance of the spirit and the substance of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Treaty, and would resume fully the its total freedom action.

The failure of the air battle against the RAF and the abandonment of war operations against England, the next and final politico-military arrangement of the Balkans and Greece, the enhanced security of Axis position, were secondary reasons but equally important in the Reich conduct vigilant attention towards the USSR and its expansionist policy, the intensions well confirmed, which was soon to offer again to Hitler are other serious grounds for concern. Already in June 1940, while Germany was strictly committed to his victorious offensive in the west, the Soviet Union deceitfully taking advantage of the current situation, it acted simultaneously and quickly to the borders of Romania occupied Bessarabia and northern Bukovina and burst further north to eastern borders of the Reich, occupying arbitrarily Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia orbiting in the pan-German world and coming into direct contact with the Reich in East Prussia, extreme territorial offshoot of Germany in Eastern Europe.[430]

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Since these last Baltic nations, which had long since been elected independent republics, had been included in Germany's sphere of influence, Hitler understood that the USSR aimed to get even closer to the borders of the Reich and would certainly have taken advantage of the situation under better strategic conditions, if, hypothetically, Germany had once again found itself engaged in a direct confrontation with England or other countries of south-eastern Europe.

It was necessary for the Fuhrer face the resurgent danger to the east, take adequate measures and finally convinced of the inevitability of a conflict with the Soviet Union to save the Reich and peoples of Europe from Bolshevism, as well as the threat appeared in the vision of Hitler and was realistically depicted the expansionist design of the USSR, which still individually and with great analogy today contrasts NATO.

Strengthening of Poland, the sending of German troops to Romania, solution of the Balkan problem turned dangerously with the Italian attack on Greece, the accommodation, the Eastern Mediterranean, were the first steps taken at the beginning of 1941 by the Fuhrer. He was followed by the permanent abandonment air offensive against England to concentrate all resources to the eastern borders of Europe, now that with the birth of the tripartite alliance were merged: Finland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria territorially arranged in succession from Karelia to the Black Sea, along the entire extent of the European borders of the Soviet Union, these nations, all equally threatened by the aggressive policy of the USSR.

The fear of the Fuhrer to repeat and fight the war on two fronts, as historically happened in World War I, and never oblate the Germanic theory of "Drang nach Osten", convinced Hitler to give up temporarily the decisive struggle against England in the certainty that the pact of "non-aggression" agreement signed with Russia, was certainly considered politically obsolete and that it was now in the historical moment to further ensure the eastern borders of the Reich and thereby saving Europe.

Once again, as happened previously in Crete, the Abwehr Dienst had underestimated his information with the potential of the USSR, not so much in number as to combat effectiveness and quality, ensuring in default at the end of 1940 the presence in European Russia 134 infantry divisions, 22 cavalry, six divisions and two armored brigades with a reserve of 25 infantry, six of cavalry and an armored division. December 18, 1940, the Fuhrer in accordance with the decisions taken against the USSR had issued Directive no. 21 to the attack east (Operation Barbarossa) based on the following assumptions:

1) Destruction of the major Soviet army stationed in western Russia, using offensive operations conducted in depth with armored spikes to prevent the retreat.

2) Increase the distance of the Soviet forces from the Reich to prevent air attacks on Germany and possible air strikes against Asiatic Russia beyond the Volga-Archangel line and industrial areas of the Urals.

3) Destruction of the Soviet air force through decisive and violent air offensive of the Luftwaffe. Soviet expansionist intentions were leaked back in November 1940 during a trip to Berlin by Commissioner for Foreign Affairs of the USSR Molotov, who submitted to the Minister Ribbentrop some significant questions that aimed to ascertain the real intentions and attitudes of the German government in case had occurred so that each articulated assumptions:

1) Soviet intervention when a new "Finnish provocations"

2) Soviet guarantee to Bulgaria by sending Russian troops

3) Soviet occupation of bases in the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus.

The answer of the Reich's representative in questions suggested by Molotov was clear and to reject unambiguous in any future intention of the Soviet bloc to further modify the political and strategic situation in Western Europe protected and entrusted to the influence of the Axis. To this add after the ideological contrast between the two powers that farther and farther away, the two protagonists of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the divergent political aspirations, antagonism arose between the Nazi Reich and the Soviet Union for the conquest of the supremacy to the ideological guidance of Europe.[431]

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April 30, 1941, the USSR unexpectedly marked a point in his favor, signing with Japan a treaty of neutrality which guaranteed Russia, like Germany, the danger of fighting on two fronts. The treaty was considered as a very serious mistake for political and strategic assessment made by the Japanese, as will deprive the Tripartite an instrument of extraordinary strategic importance and not at all exonerate the Soviet Union from treacherously attacking Japan at the moment of agony, obtaining as always great political and territorial gains.

Japan's unilateral decision, taken without consulting the Axis, seriously damaged the Fuhrer's hopes of including Japan in the anti-Bolshevik struggle and this event had a negative effect on the entourage of the Reich Chancellery, to the point of inducing Rudolf Hess - one of Hitler's major collaborators - to take off, "arbitrarily" it was said, for England, with a Bf.110 which left Stuttgart on 11 May 1941, from which Hess parachuted into the skies of Scotland, reportedly carrying a peace plan from the Fuhrer.

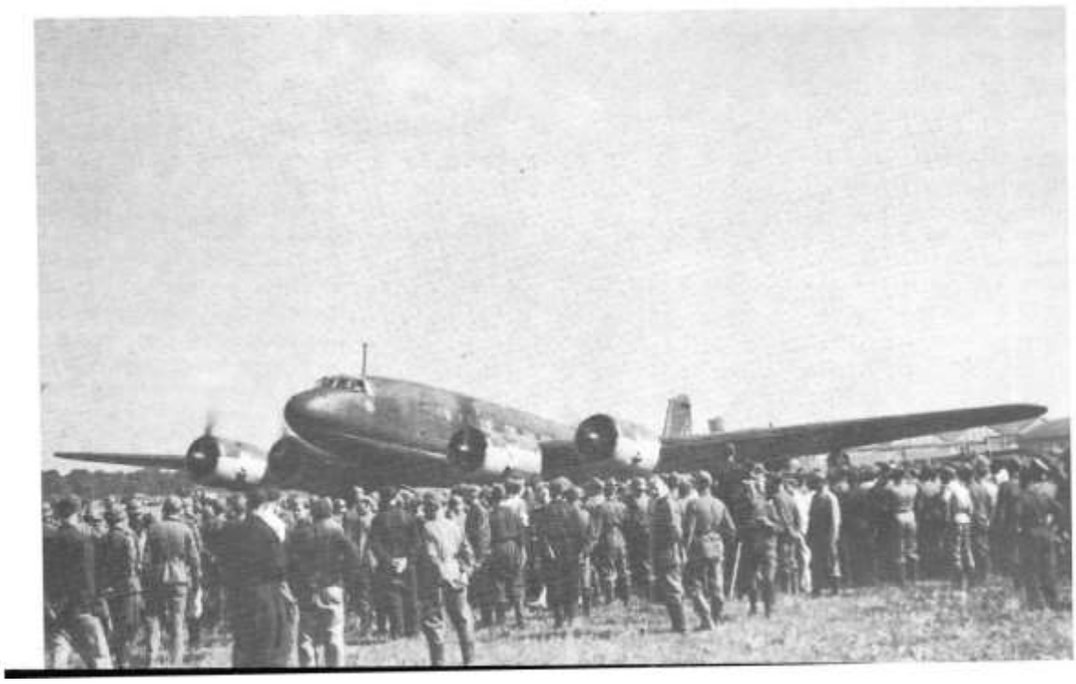
The failure of the Hess mission, imprisoned and not believed by the English, meant the definitive abandonment of Hitler's advances towards England and the search for alternative solutions to counter Soviet diplomacy, a search that materialized on June 19 with the signing of a pact of friendship and non-aggression between Germany and Turkey, aimed at thwarting any USSR designs on the Dardanelles, as anticipated at the time incautiously by Molotov and by Germany conveniently revealed to the Turks.

It had now reached the eve of “Barbarossa” and then diplomacy and political skirmish were leaving for ever the field to the strategy and military operations, and for four years they monopolized the evolution and development of the conflict on the eastern front.

In the spring of 1941, according to information received by the Abwehr, the Red Army had deployed in Western Russia: 138 infantry and cavalry divisions, 40 armoured brigades, an airborne corps with 3 paratrooper and 3 airborne infantry brigades, 4,600 aircraft of the line, most of which were of outdated construction and operational concepts, as the Abwehr had reason to point out to the OKW, also lacking in numerical deficiency in this respect.

In that Soviet forces were opposed by the OKW and judged sufficient for the purpose: 118 infantry divisions (the same number of units assigned to the attack on France in 1940), 15 motorized divisions, 19 Panzer divisions (exactly twice the "Sichelschnit”), which they had to be added, at least potentially, other 40-45 infantry divisions that would have been provided by Finland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Italy.[432]

The grand four engine of the Fuhrer - a FW. 200 numbered 26 + 00 - comes to a USSR advanced field carrying Mussolini and the action of the two Axis leaders



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The Luftwaffe participated in “Barbarossa" with 4 Luftflotten (1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th, Norway-Finland) that marshaled no less than 3000 airplanes including 1st line 1800 between bombers (He.l11, Ju.88, Do.17), Stukas Ju.87, destroyers and about 800 fighter Bf.110 and Bf.109 supplemented by about 160 Hs.123 and 126 for tactical support and aerial observation for the Heere (Army).

The Flak would have participated in the operation with 4 divisions of the Luftwaffe, obviously counting on A/A defense also on the Army anti-aircraft battalions.

The German defenses implemented for “Barbarossa” was divided as follows:

Army Group South (Field Marshal von Rundstedt) with the 6th, 11th, 17th Armies reinforced by an armored unit (1) and with the support of the 4th Air Fleet (Gen. Lohr);

Army Group Center (Field Marshal von Bock) with 2nd, 4th, 9th Armies and two armored groups (2nd and 3rd) with the support of the 2nd Air Fleet (Field Marshal Kesselring);

Northern Army Group (Field Marshal von Leelb) with the 16th and 18th Armies and reinforced by the 4th Panzer Group and supported by the 1st Air Fleet (Gen. Keller).

Support to the Finnish front operations (Army “Mannerheim" and German units) with 5th Air Fleet (Gen. Stumpf) deployed mainly in Norway.

The 4th Luftflotte had 3 Sqd. tactical reconnaissance, 316 bombers, 21 fighters, 9 fighter-bombers, 35 of support and tactical support.

The 1st Luftflotte - 5 Sqd. reconnaissance, 24 bombers, 11 Fighter, 6 Ja.Bo., 6 destroyers, 3 fighter, 24 as support and tactical support.

The 2nd Luftflotte had available 3 Sqd. reconnaissance, 30 bombers, 24 fighters, 6 Ja.Bo., 3 fighter, 24 as support. There were also 62 Flak units with 80 heavy-light anti-aircraft batteries and 84 of the Army, technical units of the Luftwaffe, airport security battalions, logistic columns, and airfield safety units.

In total there were 1,160 bombers, 720 fighters, 120 reconnaissance, 1900 Aircraft in tactical support, transportation, connection for a total of 3900 aircraft.

From a special high-altitude strategic reconnaissance units under the command of Col. Rowehl and consists of twin-engine He.111 and Do.215, were commissioned in the spring by the OKW to photograph every detail in near the Russian border and to an extent of 200 km inland, periodically updating the information held by the Abwehr in order to provide the Wehrmacht's commander-in-chief with a complete and detailed situation of the Soviet deployment.

The directives of the Fuhrer worked out and developed in detail by the Staffs of the OKW included:

“... Work should be conducted so that, neutralized the bulk of the Russian army present in western Russia by wedges made up of the German armored forces, they are to prevent the release of Russian troops still fit for combat and their dispersion on the extensive territory "; the German offensive was pursuing as a primary and ultimate goal the establishment of the Volga-Archangel barrier (European Russia) against Asiatic Russia, which would be defined in the Fuhrer's intentions, the geographical structure of the USSR.[433]

22 June 1941 - The Wehrmacht attacked the Soviet Union from Karelia to the Black Sea Partecipano the "Barbarossa" Tripartite with troops of Germans, Italians, Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, Finns.

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Facing the German armies were: Marshal Tymoshenko's Army Group (center) - Western Military District - with 4 armies and 5 tank divisions; Marshal Voroshilov's Army Group - Baltic Military District (3 armies including one tank) in the north, and finally Marshal Budjenni's Army Group in the south with 5 armies including 8 tank divisions (Kiev Military District) in whose front the CSIR was inserted.

On June 22, Operation Barbarossa began along the 1,700 km long and entire front with a general offensive by the three Army Groups of the Wehrmacht supported in the south (Black Sea) by the Romanian Army under the command of General Antonescu. The victories of the German army were immediate and the results exceeding the most optimistic forecasts, since the first week of war were captured 40,000 prisoners, 600 guns, 2,233 tanks, 4,107 aircraft; these figures that a week later they climbed to 324,000 prisoners, 7,000 tanks, 4,423 guns, 6,100 airplanes of the 13,000 that were already present before 22 June in western Russia.

The German attack was so sudden, fast and deadly that most Soviet aviation was attacked on the ground on airfields, with hundreds of aircraft deployed as on parade, who were relentlessly bombed and burned quickly. It was estimated that only in the first week of the war the Luftwaffe had destroyed to the ground from 2,000 to 3,000 Russian planes.

While it is considering objectively that the mass of Soviet aircraft established on the airfields of Poland, Belarus, Ukraine included outdated models such as I-16 fighters and older I-153, light bombers SB.2 and DB.2 and antiquated four-engined TB.3 used also for the drop of paratroopers, scouts R.5 and other antiquated models, it should be noted that they were recently in service even a share of modern aircraft such as fighter Yak.1, I-17, LaGG.3 and MiG.1, fast bombers Pe.2 and assault Il.2 still in the process of operational development, comparable to the best German aircraft. The Red Army constituted a surprise for the Germans since the beginning of the conflict. Great armament of infantry and armored vehicles including tanks T.37/T.38 and excellent T.34; field artillery possessed of efficient howitzers of 122 mm. and 203 mm., the 45/49 anti-tank gun and the 76 mm anti-tank cannon.[434]

From the first day of the war the Luftwaffe struck and set fire to the ground hundreds and hundreds of planes of the Red Army and the Wehrmacht were encircled and annihilated entire Soviet army.

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Among the range of the field and heavy guns were noted: the gun 122/28 mod. 31/37 and the Howitzer mod. 38 of the same caliber, cannon 152/40 mod. 35 and the cannon/howitzer mod. 37 of the same caliber, the excellent cannon bivalent mod. 39 (field/antitank) 76.2/41, which subsequently captured by the Germans in large quantities was transformed in the efficient antitank PAK.39. More modest AT cannon of 45/49 (ex 37 mm modified) mod. 42. Among the Red Army armored vehicles included: the recon BA.20 armored car: (speed 90 km/h), the BA.32 with a gun 45/49 (speed 70 km/h), the light tank T.27B of English inspiration and T.26C 10 tons with gun 45, the amphibian T.37 and T.38 (infantry light tank) then replaced with T.40 faster and heavier (5.5 tons.). The breakthrough tank BT.7 (14 tons.) with 45 cannon and speed 73 km/h, the T.34 with cannon of 85/55, weight 32 tons, Speed 50 km/h, one of the best armored tanks of the 2nd World War.

A gigantic mass of men, weapons and equipment of modern and partly overcome, one selected Staff and prepared that Germany believed it could beat with the experience and the recognized professional skills OKW, more preparation and training, with more discipline and high moral qualities of his soldiers with better weapons with a high technological level in terms of divisions, armored and motorized, but especially with the efficient and decisive use of the Luftwaffe always strength and security of the Wehrmacht.

THE PREMISES OF ATTACK ON THE USSR
THE C.S.I.R.
(Italian expeditionary Corp in Russia)

The decision to join the war on the side of Germany against Russia, was taken by Italy the same day that "Barbarossa" began. This determination was realized with the offer made by Mussolini to offer the Fuhrer, a Corps of three infantry divisions with complete services and air support, this offered when the Fuhrer to the Duce replied without much enthusiasm, suggesting not only to delay the sending of Italian troops on the eastern front, but on the more reinforce the front in North Africa, while further strengthening the air war and, where possible, the submarine.[435]

Stopped German Panzer Grenadiers during the battle. The Panzer units were the great protagonists of the gigantic battles of annihilation which cost serious losses to the Red Army.

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The Duce had previously had many hints and advances, the clues of an impending German attack on the USSR, and had discussed with Gen. Cavallero - Chief of the G.S.G. - highlighting the need for Italy not to desert the fight against Bolshevism at the side of the Reich and in this regard he suggested the idea to establish an expeditionary force, now that the campaign of Greece and Yugoslavia had ended successfully and many units were made available for new uses.

In constituting the expeditionary force he had proposed including an armored division (Centauro or Littorio), a motorized (Trieste) and “Grenadiers of Sardinia"; a logical prediction considering the characteristics of the new war front, but Stamage believed otherwise and suggested an alternative assignment of two units “semi-motorized" and a “Celere”: a decision that this will have negative and dramatic consequences also in the future composition of the ARMIR.

Then unilaterally decided the Italian participation, based more on the moral commitment and the military took with Germany that Italy was bound, that the usefulness of use on a front so far away and foreign to the Italian war of infantry units, in conviction to strengthen ties not only ideological, but also to return with the weighted balance Italy's gratitude to the commitment Germanic concretely implemented in Greece, Yugoslavia and North Africa, thus balancing the military and political situation.

With these assumptions, Mussolini decided to participate with an expeditionary force to the war on the eastern front, both for ideological and political reasons but also for reasons of consistency and commitment to the terms of the alliance with Germany and the practical spirit of Article n.3 of the Pact of Steel that sounded verbatim like this: “... if it should happen that a contractor nation were to become involved in military complications with another tower or other Powers, the other party will arise immediately as an ally to his side and support it with all its military forces on land, on sea, in the air."

The Italian participation had also the balancing aspect as mentioned, to compensate with the Italian units on the eastern front side by side with German soldiers, the presence of DAK in Libya and with the opportunity then to Italy, to act and show them future their point of view on a psychological and practical level playing field, outside of each artificial inferiority complex.

To all these arguments sound policies and opportunities, however, contrasted negatively the qualitative aspect of the Italian presence in Russia, since the military efficiency plan based on the weapons, equipment, materials and training, the CSIR while presenting under optimal conditions, it could not logically compete with the DAK, whose presence, operational capacity and participation in North Africa, under the leadership of a brilliant general of armored troops as Rommel, had soon given the necessary technical and military conditions for validly counteract British technical supremacy, up turning in a short time, as the main tool to success, therefore, be made to Italian commands with the rights of the wider won freedom of opinion and to maneuver, assuming uncontrolled initiatives exclude or dimension in large part, the influence of superior Italian commands. The difference between DAK and CSIR was so substantial militarily but politically viable.

Determinants results obtained from the DAK in Africa were unthinkable to obtain in Russia with the CSIR, in proportion rated as insignificant amount under the numerical and qualitative aspect when compared the gigantic struggle of titans, who fought in the east, although the presence, with sacrifice and the value of its soldiers, it was possible to obtain, as in fact occurred, respect, esteem, admiration from the most powerful ally and opponent.

The unfortunate and exhausting war in Greece had ended just 2 months before and already a new, more demanding and burdensome war prospect was taking place thousands of km from Italy, creating *in pectore** the tempting suggestion of a new military intervention which was largely extraneous to any immediate strategic, military, economic interest, if not relegated and inserted more modestly, in the more nuanced political and ideological participation in an event of gigantic dimensions, in which Italy did not have sufficiently, from a military point of view, the necessary operational and interpretative capacity, which could not be achieved with infantry units, the optimal possibilities of employment, the breaking and movement capacity due to the lack of armoured units, to evaluate a comparison according to the classic scheme - anti-tank gun, tank, airplane - now consolidated by the events that occurred in mechanized warfare over large spaces and large armoured masses, as they were expressed in the 2nd World War.[436]

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*Latin - in secret

The eastern front with its huge flat areas showed many similarities with that of North Africa, where we except by contrast, in contrast, the intense cold contrasted with the stifling heat and the impossibility of absolute freedom of movement conditioned by the period in Russia of the thaw.

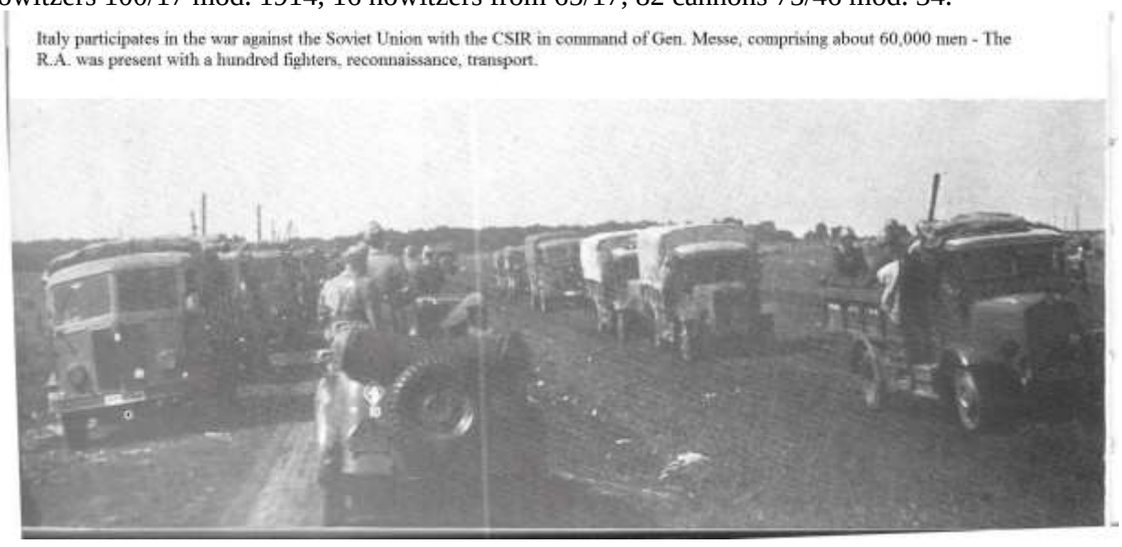
To this add after the environmental characteristics that favored the use of armored vehicles and opposed the anti-tank gun -two important operational elements -of which the Italian Army did not have adequate time effective tools in technical and military profile. As might be, it involved the Stamage to the request to send a Corps on the Eastern Front? Which Grande Unit would it select and equipment and weaponry would give them supplied? How would solve the problem of facing the combination tank - anti-tank cannon?

There were not many choices in this regard in the organic unit available to the Army: normal infantry divisions or alpine, the ambiguous “Celere” divisions and semi-motorized, some armored or motorized units of mediocre performance as it was available there in the summer of 1941 to draw on and constitute the CSIR.

Ruled out the possibility of sending to Russia the mechanized divisions destined to North Africa and in fact unrealistic owing to the lack of tanks, other equally normal infantry units normally devoid of vehicles to an extent sufficient to specific application requirements on the Russian front, fell back necessarily on a compromise over the fruit of imagination and fantasy, that of concrete reality, by selecting the CSIR two infantry divisions called "autotrasportabili", to which partly motorization theoretically guaranteed the movement of one unit of the regimental at once if it implemented gradually, while the other units stood waiting for movement or fighting. Another Italian military order inconsistency also aggravated in the case of CSIR, even by the presence of the so called Celere division (cavalry, horse drawn artillery, motorized sharpshooters), which represented a promiscuous concept with difficult to use heterogeneous units on the Russian front, and we believe on other fronts.

Completing the CSIR a CC.NN. Legion, services, various agencies and a share of L.35 tanks still equipping the armored units, despite the negative experiences in Africa and Albania and will find no practical and operational use at the front .

The selected infantry divisions were the “Torino" and the "Pasubio", the 3rd Celere Division the "Principe Amedeo d'Aosta" and the 63rd Legion CC.NN. "Tagliamento." The CSIR was selected, well trained, equipped with high moral and equipped to complete the standard levels of the Army with typical traditional Italian Army paraphernalia; stronger than 62,000 men, 5,500 vehicles, 1,550 motorcycles, 4,600 draft animals, 174 artillery pieces comprising: 24 howitzers 100/17 mod. 1914, 16 howitzers from 65/17, 82 cannons 75/46 mod. 34. [437]



Italy participates in the war against the Soviet Union with the CSIR in command of Gen. Messe, comprising about 60,000 men - The R.A. was present with a hundred fighters, reconnaissance, transport.

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There were also 64 A/A cannons of 20/65 mod. 35, n. 53,162 rifles and carbines mod. 1891, n. 8,538 guns mod. 1889 and 1934. The CSIR also had 60 L.35 tanks, 108 anti-tank cannons of 47/32, 481 mortars, 45 and 81, 581 machine guns mod. 35/37, 886 submachine guns mod. 30. The CSIR at whose command had been designated Gen. of Army Corp. Giovanni Messe, started in stages from Italy in the early days of the month of July and with 225 trains are transferred to unloading terminal in Hungary and Romania - Borsa and Botosani in stages -from where it moved into the area of employment -first in the bend of the Dnieper in Ukraine and then in that of the Donetz - operating in the Army Group Marshal von Rundstedt tactically employed by the German 11th Army. At the end of the second month of the war in the USSR and before the CSIR began to operate, the Wehrmacht had conquered 50,000 square kilometers of Soviet territory by capturing 1.2 million prisoners, 14,000 guns, 15,000 tanks, 11,500 planes. More than 3 million Russian soldiers were dead or wounded in the great battles of annihilation.

ITALIAN AVIATION IN RUSSIA

Acceptance by the OKW of the Italian contingent was decided on June 3 and with this decision were established all operating modes, operating, service, logistics, administrative who had to submit the Italian units of the CSIR, whose sector of insertion was fixed initially along the Dniester between the German 17th Army and the Romanian 4th, while further north was deployed the 11th Army that organically completed the Army Group South of von Rundstedt supported from the aircraft by the 4th Luftflotte of Gen. Lohr of about 1,600 strong combat aircraft and fighters.

The protocol that regulated the aviation activities of CSIR was signed on 30 June 1941 in Berlin by General Marras as the Italian Military Attaché and Gen. Keitel for the OKW and countersigned by Col. Gottschling of Stabs OKW. It was ratified with the order G.Kds 2023/41 and by the Air Force Attaché Col. Teucci with orders G.Kds 2062/41 for its aviation part and sent to Superaereo 11 July 1941 for the execution of its contents.

The protocol provided for the allocation of the reconnaissance group to CSIR command and tactics depending on the fighter group from the 4th Air Fleet (5th Flieger Korps).

On July 14, the Supreme Command with order n. 20770/OP established procedures for the use and dependence of the CSIR command with direct coordination by the Corp., the tactical use by the 11th German Army with the collaboration of the Army connection unit and the R.A. link unit at the 4th Luftflotte. When it came to the air force command the CSIR were set out in this regard the tasks of dependence on the CSIR command established with the directive issued by the appropriate G.S.A and signed by the Chief of the G.S. Gen. Pricolo and including: technical advice to the CSIR command to use OA/CT; Order of operations drawn up at the request of the CSIR command; liaison and coordination with allied air units operating in the field of insertion of the CSIR.

The 17 July 1941 prot. n. 2/6142 was formed in Tudora the CSIR Aviation Command explained in detail from 2nd Rep. 1st Div. Regulations to the G.S.A and including as staff in the original nucleus of incorporation: Maj. G. Fea, the Capt. M. D'Havet and G. Bonrnartini, Lt.. Manoja Romagna.

The airport of Bucharest/Baneasa assigned as a logistics base had the conventional number 80 and P.M. 102. The consequent discussion with the delegation of the Luftwaffe in Romania were held by Gen. BA. Mattei on behalf of the Supreme Command and was established as the area of application sector between Dordhoi, Kamenez and Podolsk but was soon overtaken by the fast German advance and replaced with another further east.

The consistency of the air component for CSIR would be represented, at the express wish of the OKW, as from a tactical fighter and reconnaissance units, to, provide the Italian G.U. the needed air support act to offset in part the limited technical capacity and war readiness of Italian terrestrial equipment.

The preliminary services for the Italian aviation intervention were discussed in Bucharest in early July and included technical details, employment, logistics and accommodation in the field of action assigned to the CSIR.[438]

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Among the agreed terms for the Italian aviation use in Russia, established between the Commission and the Italian delegation of the Deutsche Luftwaffe in Romania, was expected to be ceded fuel by the Germans, technical materials, special food, meat and special foodstuffs, while the Italian Air Force would have to provide their own transportation to the technical workshops and sending workers, compared to materials, equipment, materials for VE, livelihood, health, transport and aeronautical engineering units for the accommodation of airfields assigned and how they function.

The flight units would initially brought in tow ammunition clips and grenades for 30 missions, as well as lubricant in use in the R.A. (castor oil).

Moreover it should be added the special requests to the GS/RA from the commander CSIR by the Supreme Command, which called for the creation of a mobile aviation organization in a position to quickly follow the movement of motorized troops, and to enable the constant tactical aspect, both to meet the German need to ensure a valid air support to operations. The units of the 1st line also had to be supplemented by a share of transport aircraft capable of moving rapidly the necessary supplies for the CSIR, considering the enormous intervening distances on the Russian front and the difficulties of road and rail communications.

It was evident in the demands of Gen. Messe, the concern to resolve, however in part the serious problems that were placed at the front with small moving parts in which was divided the CSIR and secure at the same time, a minimum of the capacity for autonomous action using profitably transport aircraft, of which the Germans possessed and used a large extent (over 600 Ju. 52).

The GS/RA in ensuring that everything possible would be done to comply with the requests, CSIR assigned to a core group of 8 tri-motor SM.81 transport, judging simply but this share soon had to be tripled.

On July 25 was officially established in Tudora the CSIR Aviation Command that was given to Col. Charles Drago, place as established reporting directly to the CSIR Command with the following service guidelines:

1) Use of fighter and reconnaissance units within the CSIR;

2) Orders of service from the CSIR Command for the use of employed air units;

3) Establishment of a technical and operational liaison body between CSIR Aviation Command and the Command of the 4th Luftflotte.

Which unit to assign to the setting up of Aviation Command were selected on 61st Group O.A. stationed in Mostar and 22nd independent group CT based in Tirana, a core of a liaison aircraft, transport and health. A total of about 1,700 men between officers, non-commissioned officers, specialists, airmen and militarized workers with 99 aircraft divided into twin-engine Ca.311 (32), fighter MC.200 (51), three-engined SM.81 (8), twin-engine BR.20 (1), Ca.133/T (3), SM.82 (1), Ca.164 (4), supplemented with 300 vehicles, mobile workshops, to arm 3 airports facilities, 18 machine guns 20/65, 1400 tons of materials of all kinds for the operation of the units, technical efficiency, logistics services, communications, health, mail from the field and Military Police.

A technical and logistical set back was formed in Bucharest/Baneasa base for the Group's fighters and one in Bucharest/Otopeni for OA, an advanced airfield was prepared at Tudora for sorting and orientation of the units and to fulfill all the logistical requirements with Romanian railway terminal of Dolhasca on which they had to get the convoys from Italy with the staff and the material.

The CSIR Aviation was divided in the following structure:
Command (Office employees)
General Staff
Secretary Cipher Office
Operations office
Sorting office
Personal office
CC.RR. Sec.
Stewardship (service employees)
Transport
MSA material
Technical material
Telecommunications
Commissioner
Sanitation
motor pool.[439]

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State property office
Armements
Fuel Lubricant
Propaganda
Assistance
Subsistence

The choice of flight material unlike what was done in September 1940 for the CAI, proved this time careful and real and with aspects slightly improvement, both for the widest existing availability, both for a more appropriate selection of flight material.

The transfer order for the 22nd Group Autonomous CT (Maj. Giovanni Borzoni) with 359th /362nd/369th/371st Sqd. included the following stages: Tirana - Belgrade – Bucharest/Baneasa - Focsani - Tudora and except a few incidents of modest significance was completed successfully in the allotted time, between the end of July stationed in Tirana, and early August.

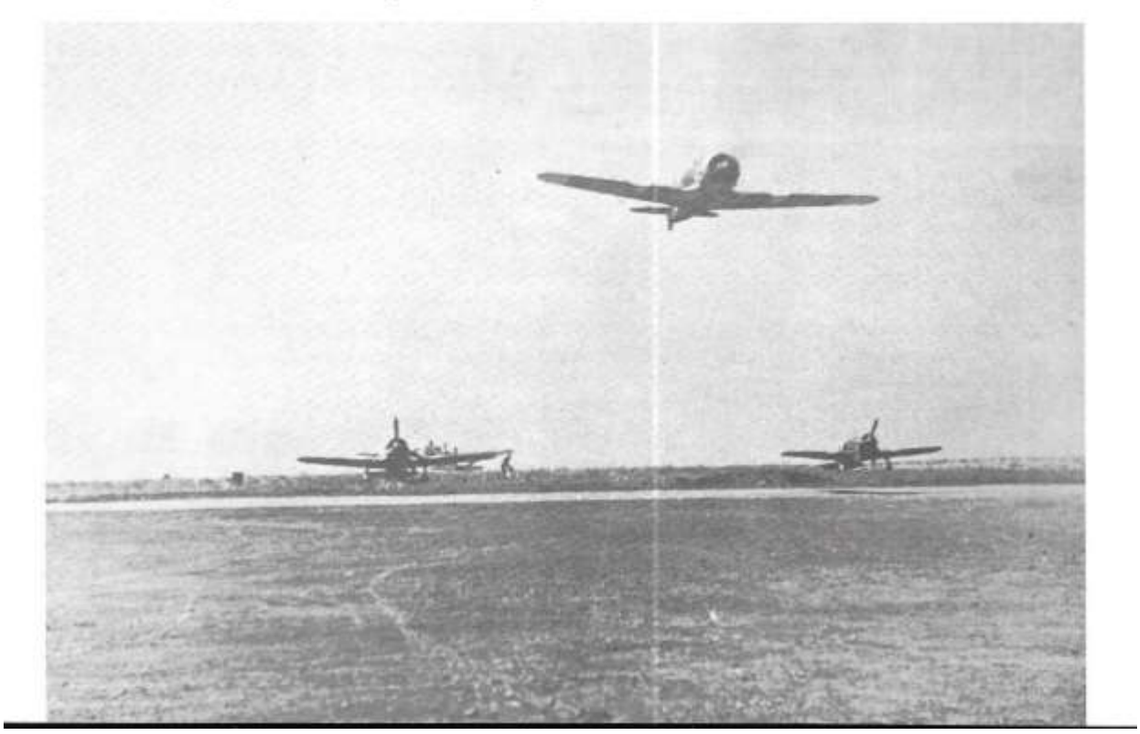
For the 61st Group OA (Lt. Col. Giuseppe Chierighini, then Lt. Col. Tito Ragnelli) was necessary to block the planned departure for the Aegean of the 119th Sqd. Aut. OA and achieve reunification of the unit with the 34th and 128th squadrons based at Mostar, which formed organically from scratch the group itself at the end of June according to the directives issued by Esercitavia.

The 61st Group is now moved to complete in stages from Mostar on the route Belgrade-Bucharest/Otopeni- Focsani- Tudora that arrived on 11 August.

Between 12 and 16 August the two units assigned to the CSIR were conditioned with the hallmarks of optical and chromatic recognition prescribed by the OKW for the three sectors of the Eastern Front and the Italian aircraft ordered as is known to operate in southern sector, had a wrap-around chrome yellow strip in the fuselage, engine hood and with wingtips the same color, as well as for fighters, two white triangles with the apex backward paintings for bottom and top of the wing panels.

On August 14, the Air Force Quartermaster/CSIR was starting the first of the 7 cars technical logistic columns prepared for the new airfield of Kirovo, arriving four days later by 137 vehicles of R.A.[440]

Mc 200 of 22nd Group CT taking off from a field of Ukraine, the Aviation of CSIR under the command of Col. Carlo Drago consisted of 22nd Group CT, the 61st Group OA and 245th Sqd T..



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For fighter the Macchi C.200 represented in 1941 the best existing machine in the first line, strength, war interpretations, despite the significant limitations due to the open cockpit that existing in the freezing temperatures in Russia in the winter would create serious physical difficulties to the pilots for facial and limb frostbite. For aerial observation the twin-engine Ca.311, even with the modest quality with honestly acquitted the tasks responsible for the small reconnaissance, bombing and strafing, the best accommodation protected in the cabin for the crew, the good speed (365 km/h) and range (1,950 km).

The problems associated with the use in Russia with this type of aircraft, were undoubtedly lower than those created with MC.200 but there were too and were manifested by difficulty in setting in motion the engines, with power reductions in particular climatic conditions over the usual optical reflection phenomena that caused deformities and abnormal visual effects in the surrounding and underlying images flown over the area. But outside of these objective considerations and overcome the choice of flight material selected from the technical section of the G.S.A for the eastern front, occurred on other logical considerations, and especially on a more real-war technical evaluation of flight material that the Soviet Union could potentially use to oppose the Italian air force.

It was not of course to establish a comparison with the RAF material and its excellent collection of airplanes, since the USSR in 1941 did not have high technical characteristics and military aircraft, such as not to trouble the Italian air force nor the most prepared Luftwaffe, although there were in the V.V.S. faster aircraft and better armed than the Italian ones that co-existed with other outdated and mediocre airplanes.

From information gathered by the SIM and processed appropriately by S.I.A. with the integration of other elements, what the Italian Air Force they knew of the Soviet Air Force called Voenno Vozdushni Sili - (V.V.S.) – in the summer of 1941, concerned the assessment in western Russia of the following air units:

36 Air Divisions and 2nd autonomous Regiments located as follows:

Military Area of Leningrad (6 Div.: 1st, 29th, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 70th) and 1 Air Fleet with Div. 50th and 80th -Strength alleged: n. 1,000 aircraft.

Military Area of the Baltic (4 Div.: 4th, 7th, 8th, 42nd) -Strength n. 1,200 aircraft.[441]

The MC. 200 photograph of Capt. Carlo Maurizio Ruspoli after combat with Soviet fighters and later forced landing ended happily for the brave Italian pilot.

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Western Special Military Zone, (6 Div.: 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 58th) - Strength n. 1,800 aircraft.
Kiev Military Zone (5 Div.: 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th) - Strength n. 500 aircraft.
Military Area of Odessa (3 Div.: 20th, 21st, 22nd and 51st autonomous Regiment) - Strength n. 500 aircraft.
Moscow Military Zone (3 Div.: 23rd, 24th, 27th) - Strength n. 700 aircraft.
Military Area of Orel Military Area (2 Div.: 46th, 47th) -Strength n. 300 aircraft.
Military Area of Kharkov (1 Div.: 35th) -Strength n. 150 aircraft.
Caucasus Military Zone, North. (2 Div.: 14th, 28th) -Strength n. 350 aircraft.
Caucasus Military Zone, South. (2 Div.: 25th, 26th and 1 autonomous Regiment) -Strength n. 400 aircraft.

Altogether gravitated in western Russia between 180-190 Air Regiments sub-divided into 5 of heavy bomber 60 of fast bomber, 20 of light bomber (attack/reconnaissance), 50 fighter, 50 as support (transportation, training, connections) for a total of 553 squadrons of the 1st line and 200 by auxiliary service.

Aircraft assigned to areas of Kiev/Odessa were divided between the aeronautical centers of Kiev/Cernauti and Chisinau (Bessarabia), in whose jurisdiction were stationed about 200 four-engined TB.3 assigned also for the requirements of the local paratroopers school, and finally the aeronautical center of Cetatea Alba with jurisdiction over Southern Bessarabia and the Crimea, almost exclusively equipped with seaplanes of which existed a school in Sevastopol.

Another 12 Air Divs. were deployed in the Far East at the disposal of the, 2nd and 15th Armies; 5 more divisions were also located in other areas of strategic importance of the USSR for a total of 298 squadrons divided into 35 of heavy bomber, 80 of fast bomber, 65 light bomber/attack/reconnaissance and 118 fighter.

The characteristics of the main military aircraft among the most popular of the V.V .S. were the following:

Heavy bombers:
TB.3 (Tupolev): four-engine, maximum speed 215 km/h 2,200 kg bombs, range 2,200 km.
Pe.8 (Petlyakov): four-engine, maximum speed 438 km/h, 4,000 kg bombs, range 5,400 km.
Fast/light bombers
SB.2 (Tupolev): twin engine, Max speed 424 km/h, 600 kg bombs, range 1,200 km.
Su.2 (Sukhoi): single engine, Max speed 485 km/h, 600 kg bombs, range 1,200 km.
Il.4 (Ilyushin): twin engine, Max speed 410 km/h, 2,500 kg bomb, range 1,260 km.
Pe.2 (Petlyakov): twin engine, Max speed 540 km/h, 1,000 kg bombs, range 1,500 km (the most modern of bombers / attackers).
Fighter
I.16 (Polikarpov): Max vel. 464 km/h, four machine guns, 800 km autonomy.
I.17 (Polikarpov): Max vel. 490 km/h, one cannon, two machine guns, 800 km autonomy.
MiG.1 (Mikoyan -Gurevich): Max vel. 627 km/h, 3 machine guns, range 600 km (the most modern of Soviet fighters).
Scouts
PO.2 (Polikarpov): Max vel. 146 km/h, 1 machine gun, 250 kg of bombs, autonomy km 430.
MBR.2 (Beriev): Max vel. 248 km/h, two machine guns, 300 kg of bombs, range 1,200 km.
KOR-1 (Beriev): Max vel. 240 km/h, two machine guns, 100 kg of bombs, range 500 km.
MDR.6 (Tchetverikov): Max vel. 360 km/h, two machine guns, 600 kg of bombs, range 1,200 km.

Soviet aviation, unlike that of the US, had set its service philosophy in eminently tactical function and this explains the presence in the 1st line to a considerable extent bomber/assault in the proportion of 3/5 compared with the fighter and 1/8 compared with heavy/strategic bombers. From the point of view of aviation employment was directly employed by the Red Army and its G.S. a rate of 75 percent and G.U.A. They were organically assigned to the ground army with which they shared the use, by participating in the war with specific and detailed planning operations normally inserted in the elaboration of the offensive or defensive plan drawn up to Corps level (ABON).

The G.U.A. They are composed of promiscuously Regiments, bombers, fighters and reconnaissance aircraft that participated in the operation with a specific task, in relation to their ability and capacity for action.[442]

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Only some autonomous G.U.A. were held in reserve by STAVKA for particular tasks and used in relation to the evolution of the operations.

In the sector assigned to the CSIR - fronted the jurisdiction of the Command of the Kiev Military District (Gen. MP Kirponus) - operated the Air Divs. 36th, 16th and 18th employed by the 17th Air Army (Gen. Krassavskij) in conjunction with the 3rd Airborne Corps (Gen. A.I. Rodmicev) and 4th of Gen. A.F. Levashov total strength of 16,000 men, including paratroopers and airborne infantry and it was with some of these air units that Italian fighters of 22nd Group CT clashed for the first time on 27th August, managing to shoot down in the course of the fighting that ensued between 8 bombers and fighters.

On August 30 it was the turn of reconnaissance of 61st Group OA to clash with Soviet fighters during a photographic mission in the area of Dniepropetrowsk, where 3 Ca.311 were attacked by 2 Rata (I-6) being able to bring one down. The final technical and aviation logistics structure CSIR, was set to a regular air service between Italy and Romania (Bucharest / Baneasa and Otopeni airports), on a logistical / operational terminal (Tudora airport) to 480 km from Bucharest and in whose area they were the railway terminals - logistics of the CSIR (Dolhasca-Botosani) 70 km from Tudora - reachable by convoys in 2 hours travel.

The next stop set at Kirowgrad Soviet territory (about 300 km from Tudora) was later replaced in the airfield for availability used by the Luftwaffe for air transport, with the Kriwoj Rog Airport (850 km from Tudora) on which were implanted workshops and deposits with an intense movement of convoys that traveled the distance between Tudora and return on average in 7 days, objectively considering the huge traffic of existing vehicles in the itinerary tract Belzj-Dubosari-Tiraspol-Pervomajsk-Kriwoj Rogo

It was necessary to resort in part to Army convoys to transport the aircraft equipment to the base under construction.

To avoid misunderstandings and complaints from the CSIR Command, Gen. Pricolo sent a memo to Gen. Messe putting him on notice of the difficulties initially and that they would inevitably also be presented in the future, especially in view of the rapid advance forward of the Germans and consequently shift to the east of the aeronautical units of the CSIR, the insufficiency of transport aircraft used for certain needs of the Germans and the commitment of the G.S./RA to increase their number, pointing out in this regard that would be sent only tri-motor SM .81 or similar, given the difficulties to operate on small airfields the SM.82, whose single copy sent to Russia for operational assessments, had established certain drawbacks presented themselves for a full load take-offs on small size airfields.

The logistical difficulties that they had to face and overcome, included the supply of fuel in the primary order for aviation to be collected from the German railway terminal of Pervomajsk (about 300 km from Kriwoj Rog) along impossible roads and clogged up to capacity, by thousands vehicles employed to logistical services for the Army Group South; for the supply of provisions and equipment materials were created by the Intendenza advanced deposits at Saksagan, Dniepropetrovsk and Stalino and much material was purchased by special committees in Hungary and Romama.

For the aircrew Italian was fixed in agreement with the German authorities that provided directly to the supply, a special daily rations – (reserved for flight days) including whole milk (or condensed), 1 egg, butter (25 gr.), oatmeal (gr. 25), white bread (gr. 200), a Roast package (65 gr.). Was specified in the duration of the flight hours or the number of daily flights to qualify for the special food for aircrews comprising: Chocolate (gr. 50), dextrose (gr. 25) or other energy foods (canned fruit, sweets, candy, etc.), gr. 100 biscuits, coffee (20 gr.).

The SM.81 transport aircraft for the CSIR were ceded by the 56th Group T, and Capt. Caprioglio was appointed the transport unit, while the Caproni Ca.133/S unit was assigned to Capt. Marzari.

October 1st was contused in Bucharest-Baneasa the 245th Sqd. T with 9 SM.81, being lost in the course of transfer from Italy a tri-motor which crashed near Postojna with the deaths of the four men crew.[443]

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On 1 September reached the eastern front a cinematic section detached from Squadron "P" and placed at the command of Capt. Leo Concato.

It consisted of a three-engine Cant.l007 Bis with a panoramic camera view and two MC.200 with wing-camera to film military preparations and air combat.

For reasons of operational and logistical order in the CSIR area of expertise they were also placed Hungarian aviation squadrons namely a Sqd. with 9 CR.42 and a section of Re.2000 at the airfield of Kriwoi Rog, a bomber Sqd. with 4 Ca.135 Bis. and 8 Ju.86 at Pervomajsck two Sqd. with 18 between He.46 and "Solyon" Hungarian production Kasanka and Kriwoi Rog.

Romanian Corps in the USSR entered as aviation of the CSIR in 4th Luftflotte included:

11 He.111	160 IAR.80
12 IAR.81	120 IAR.37-38
20PZL.II/B	20 Ju.52
10 Do.17	15 Potez 63
6 Cant.501	12 Hurricane
30 SM.79/B	11 Blenheim
55 Bf.l09	20 Fi.156

* * *

In the months of August and September it was necessary to overcome some logistical difficulties caused by the forward movement of the main warehouses of Tudora.

THE WAR OPERATIONS

In late July, after the initial traumatic impact with the vehemence of the Wehrmacht, the Red Army began to resist German pressure with more polished and better coordination defensive capabilities.

The German armored spearheads could not get from infantry units the desirable collaboration and the necessary speed of action to realize the large pockets of annihilation by the proposed "Blitz Krieg Strategy" and many Soviet divisions could slip between the broad cracks in the encirclement nullifying in part the success of the Panzer divisions.

The roadmap drawn by the OKW for the conquest of Moscow and the achievement of the Archangel-Volga-Caspian line appeared increasingly problematic and in any case certainly not by the fall of 1941 as the German high command had expected.

It was to push as much as possible to the east before winter and settle on the defensive, waiting to continue in 1942 the remaining offensive plan aimed at the conquest of western Russia up to the foothills of the Urals and the Caucasus to the south.

We were with the first disappointments some differences of opinion between the OKH (Army) and Hitler, partly supported by the OKW, which inevitably delayed the implementation of some important operational decisions, other differences between obtaining military results (OKH) and the conquest of political and economic ends (Fuhrer), resulting in the diversion south of forces (Ukraine, Don, Crimea) and North (Karelia and Leningrad-Ladoga) as demanded by Hitler in contrast to the destruction of Soviet units placed in defense of Moscow as pursued by the OKH.

Immediately after the German attack on the USSR were connected between England and the Soviet Union closer relations of alliance and cooperation than in the past, based on mutual convenience to fight Nazi Germany, to strengthen the military alliance with supplies for Russia, to create, behind particular insistence of Stalin, the premises for the opening of a second front in the war that forced the Reich to fight fatally as feared by Hitler on two sides.

In the message of the day 8 July 1941 directed to Stalin, Winston Churchill stated some clauses of the alliance as well, established:

1) Mutual aid without any clarification about the quality and quantity;

2) Neither of the two countries to conclude a separate peace. The British contribution to the common fight against Germany would be provided initially with the intensification of the raids of bombers on the Reich and the naval fight in the Arctic to allow the regular flow of direct supplies to Archangel, by sending RAF fighters squadrons to Murmansk.

On July 26 it was decided to send 200 Curtiss P.40 "Tomahawk" to Archangel-Murmansk as well as motors, rubber, technical equipment and other strategic material.[444]

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In September, 40 Hurricanes were sent to Murmansk followed by another 150 by the end of the month and 50 new Spitfires equipping the squadrons of the RAF based in the area.

Courses were initiated by the RAF also education for Russian aviators: pilots, motorists, specialists in general. Also taken were arrangements for a monthly supply of 400 aircraft and 500 tanks of small and medium-weight as well as for the sending of strategic materials from Persia with 12 trains daily.

On 21 Aug. '41 a new directive of the Fuhrer challenged the thought of the OKH on the continuation of the war and was giving precise instructions for the conquest of the Crimea, the coal and industrial region of the Donetz, the disruption of fuel supplies to the Russians in the region the Caucasus and the isolation of Leningrad to operate the reunification with the Finnish troops. These directives only interested the Armed Groups North and South and it was in this operational unit that the CSIR and the Italian air force operated.

While the shortage of vehicles slowly allowed the forward displacement of the single Inf. Div. the "Pasubio" and would introduce serious confusion and perplexity with the Command of Army Group, which rightly and logically based on the Italian official definition, believed the "semi motorized" divisions were motorized, aviation thanks to faster means of travel and field accommodation, was able to operate immediately, and pending a full gathered the CSIR in the employment area was used even before the end of August by the command of the 4th Luftflotte (Gen. Lohr) to contribute to the operations of the III Panzer Kps in the field of Dniepropetrowsk with supervisory cruises, escort and strafing, monitoring of the lines of communications and concourse of CSIR, these missions which were carried out mainly by the 22nd Group CT.

The start of the war for Italian aviation units in Russia coincided with the first major Soviet counter-offensive the against "Guderian" armored Army and the 17th Army, which were attacked in late August with 3 Armies (13th, 21st and 56th) reinforced by two air brigades made available by Gen. Eremenko from STAVKA (Staff of Red Army) in addition to air regiments of the armed mentioned, that this force because of heavy losses did not exceed 500 aircraft (50% bombers, 30% Assault, 20% fighters) under the command of Gen. Petrov, and were [these planes collided at the end of the month with the Macchi C.200 of the 22nd group CT and the Ca.311 of the 61st OA.

Operational coordination of the Italian fighter group, the employee in this aspect by 5th Flieger Korps, was included in Na.Ka.fu./Stalino (Nah Kampf Fuhrer Tactical Command reconnaissance and combat the Stalino sector) and in the third week of August now ready for use and placed in 4 airfields assigned Italian aviation: Kriwoi Rog, Saporoshje, Stalino, Tudora (technical and logistical) units of RA stood in line as follows: Kriwoi Rog: Sqd. 359th (Capt. V. Minguzzi) and 362nd (Capt. G. La Ferla) of 22nd Group CT, Sqd. 34th (Capt. C. Bonino) of 61st Group O.A.; Saporoshje: 369th Sqd. CT (Capt. G. Jannicelli) and 128th Sqd. OA. (Capt. G. Di Mark); Stalino: 371st Sqd. CT (Capt. E. Meille) and 119th Sqd. O.A. (Capt. Bonmartini).

The large Saporoshje airbase was home, before "Barbarossa", of a V.V.S. bomber school and when it was occupied by the aviation of the CSIR was completely inefficient for the severe damage done by the Russians at the time of the evacuation under the German threat.

The air force of the CSIR had its first loss on August 28 when returning from a combat mission fell in the MC.200 2nd Lt. Pilot Mario Longoni of 362nd Sqd. of the 22nd Group CT.

The tragic incident occurred on the airfield of Kriwoi probably Rog do to a loss of lift.

The Soviet attack failed, and on September 15 the German pincer blocked and destroyed 4 Armies in the Kiev area capturing about 650,000 soldiers, 884 tanks, 3,718 guns, when the operation itself greater understanding in the pocket of the territory also of the Dnieper which operated the CSIR.

The "Pasubio" Inf. Div. (Gen. V. Giovannelli) entered the line on August 12 in the area Pokrowskoje clashing with Russian rearguard in Yasnaya Polyana and in the same day was recorded the first Italian fallen in the land of 'Russia. In the days following the continued the march under continuous strafing of Soviet aviation and aerial bombardment opposed by Italian and German fighters, while the CSIR slowed in its march by showers and cut off roads, it was deployed along over 300 km of hard roads and without asphalted territory they had put to the proof Italians vehicles not suitable for prolonged efforts of impervious streets and unsuited to particular operations. [445]

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On August 28, the CSIR while still being transferred, received the visit of the Fuhrer and the Duce arrived at the Russian front with a military mission. Gen. Messe gave a status report to Mussolini bringing real relief and humiliating conditions in which he had to operate the CSIR, which regardless of its numerical amount significantly lower than the Romanians, Hungarian, Slovak, Finnish, and equal to 2% of forces deployed in the field by the Wehrmacht in Russia, possessed than usual and modest weapons in artillery and individual weapons mostly built before the great war 1915-18 or dating at the time models with the exception of the 16 anti-aircraft guns of 75/46 mod. 34 relatively modern, mortars and automatic weapons as accompaniment, with 47/32 antitank unfit to damage the Soviet tanks, with poor and mediocre vehicles with modest movement speed and efficiency and completely inadequate to keep up with the fast advance of German unity with serious moral, psychological and operational for the prestige of the Italian Armed Forces.

Mussolini listened concerned to the report and did not say a word, having personally seen the reality of the facts clearly and dutifully from the commander of the CSIR.

It was the same humiliating situation found in the war on the western front campaigns, in northern and eastern Africa, Greece and Yugoslavia which had not been in over a year of improvement in any war. It was also present at the report Gen. Cavallero Chief of the G.S.G. traveling with the Duce in Russia in August 1941, the pilot Col. Luigi Gallo -person the Supreme Command as a consultant of the SMA - compiled a report to Gen. Pricolo, emphasizing the political, economic, military detected while in Russia, the visit to the HQ of the Fuhrer in Rastenburg (East Prussia), to HQ of the Reich Marshal Goering at Prostken, to the HQ of the OKH of Field Marshal von Brauchitsch who looked after the preparation of the detailed operational plans.

Mussolini talking with Gen. Messe commander of the CSIR - Gen. Messe expressed to the Duce his reservations about the CSIR structure and difficulties operating in Russia with foot units of infantry.

The Italian military mission, after the visit to the brain of the Wehrmacht, moved by plane to Uman (680 km east) on the morning of August 28 using two four-engined FW.200 including the staff of the Fuhrer (26-00) that Mussolini wanted pilot for a stretch assisted by Commander Bauer, Hitler's personal pilot.

The visit to the airfields of the Luftwaffe and the German Army units aroused great impression for discipline, order, abundance of means, weapons and equipment. Next visit to Brest Litowski with the fortifications of the "Stalin" line and stormed on 29 and 30 August, the inspection of the German troops and the CSIR. Overall, the Duce had piloted the FW.200 for the 7h 10' flight.

In early September the Russian air force attacked several times with bombers and fighters the Dniepropetrowsk area, where Italian engineers were building a bridge of boats to replace those destroyed by the Russians in retreat; the attacks and the artillery fire that halted on several occasions the rebuilding of the bridge, that was extended for over 26 days since almost the end of September.[446]

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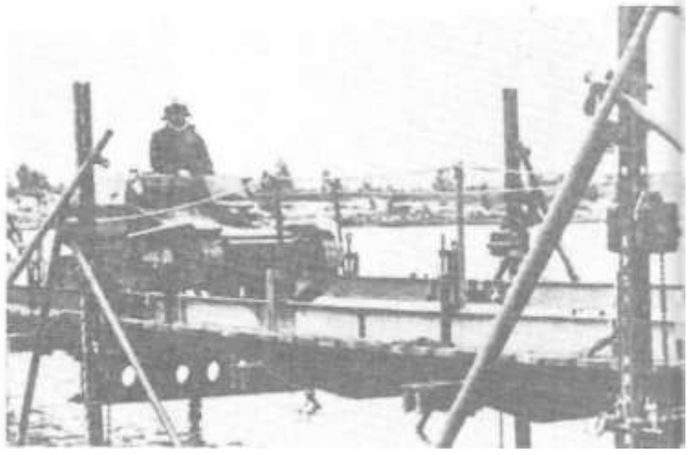
The Feld Marshal Keitel illustrates the Duce and the Fuhrer's military situation of the front, are noticed among those present from the left. Col del Gallo of the GS., Gen. Cavallero and to the right Gen. Lohr.

It was intense at that first operating period the aviation competition who performed tactical reconnaissance and photography, escort missions for reconnaissance and protection to infantry units hard pressed in the bend of the Dnieper staggering in the areas assigned - at first the "Torino" Inf. Div. (Gen. L. Manzi), then the 3rd Celere Div. (Gen. M. Marazzani) and 63rd CC.NN. Legion "Tagliamento" (Cons. N. Nicchiarelli) who participated jointly in the battle of Petrikowka successful performance with the assistance of the 3rd and 14th Panzer Korps.

On September 27, Gen. Messe sent to Col. Drago a warm message of thanks (Tele no. 5985/OP) for aviation participate in operations: "... Italian Air Force has, as always, generously cooperated with troops, demonstrating overwhelming moral superiority and technique on the ball, often greater in number."

Small L 35 tank also present in Russia with the CSIR, traverse the Dnieper directed towards the sector of the CSIR deployment. The composition of the CSIR did not represent the most advanced and modern look of the war in the USSR



In this praise also joined Gen. Lohr aimed specifically at enhancing the contribution of Italian aviators in the great battle waged by the Army Group South, which had led to the capture of Kiev. A telegram of praise for the behavior of the CSIR was sent by the Fuhrer to Mussolini, with another by Field Marshal von Kleist to Gen. Messe: "... to express; to the Italian Expeditionary Corps my praise and congratulations for the great success". On 1 Oct. 1941 as already mentioned, was founded in Tudora the 245th Sqd. T. (Capt. E. Caprioglio) with 9 SM.81 that intensified the service shuttle played until then by three-engined transport SM.81 available to the Air Force Command of the CSIR.

In early October continued the advance of the CSIR over the Dnieper in the large industrial and mining region up to Stalino occupied on October 28.

The Duce and Fuhrer accompanied by the G.S. of the OKW - by Field Marshal Keitel and Gen. Judl and by Gen. Lohr commander of the 4th Luftflotte, just arrived on the airfield Saphoroshje on 8/26/1941.

The inadequate training of the Italian infantry for different forms of fighting, with isolated and deeply technical combats such as those that often occurred on the Russian front, and which required new knowledge, armaments, individual interpretations, different doctrines and equipment that the Italian soldiers did not possess even if certain difficulties were made easier by the retreat of the Russian troops and by the different moral and psychological conditions in which the Soviets were forced to fight.[447]

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An initial situation of favor with relative moral superiority, which could however be dramatically reversed if one day the Italian soldiers found themselves in these negative conditions.

Everything as always, took place with improvisation and superficiality.

In late October the CSIR entered into crisis due to the slowed flow of logistics - especially food supplies - the lengthening of the units blocked by the rains and mud hundreds of kilometers of slopes, lack of suitable vehicles can operate in better condition technical or off road vehicles like the German half-tracks. By then, the "Torino" had traveled 1400 kilometers on foot, more unfortunate than the semi-motorized "Pasubio" in stages and to the horse drawn "Celere".

In the following days were occupied the villages of Rykowa, Gorlowka, Nikitonka, whose town was besieged for several days by the "Chiaramonti" column of the "Pasubio" by an entire Russian division. The resistance lasted for nine long days until such time as a providential snowstorm allowed the remnants of the garrison to retire after having had 130 dead, 400 wounded, 16 missing. A great sacrifice rewarded with the granting of M.O.v.m. to the 80th infantry Regt.

On 8 November, the 22nd Group Autonomous CT was detached from tactical dependence of the 4th Luftflotte and placed under the direct employment by the CSIR command.

Between mid-October and that of November, the onset of the winter season with heavy rains, flooding, heavy snowfall and bad weather with little or no visibility, had first then slowed and finally blocked flight activity for mired airfields, without paved runways and bad weather conditions. This typically Russian reality, had prevented the presence of fighters and scouts in the area where operating units of the CSIR, which opposed not suffered harassment by Soviet aviation equally absent from the sky of the battle.

Much more intense was the activity of the transport squadrons, which filled some serious logistical dysfunctions such as the scarce availability of food, the urgent request for heavy clothing and, as an even more urgent measure, the evacuation of the wounded to be hospitalised who were blocked by road closures in the advanced dressing stations.[448]

Reconnaissance flight with a Ca 311 of the 61st Group OA - The unit under the command of Lt. Col. Chierighini effected numerous actions bombing and strafing in tactical support to the CSIR.

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With a continuous shuttling between Tudora, Kriwoi Rog, Stalino Dniepropetrowsk and the SM.81 assisted on occasions by Ca.133 and twin-engine reconnaissance transported over a hundred tons of food, clothing, medicines and no fewer than 120 military assigned to particular tasks, transferring in hospitals around 800 wounded and evacuated sick, started part in field hospitals 820 and 830 and in the second intervention n. 159 of Jusovka.

Frequent trips were made between Maritei - home of the special warehouse of Health-Chemical-Veterinary Medicine - and Pervomajsk - the advanced operational headquarters - between Stalino and Belzy-Suceava for urgent supplies of emergency food and to ensure, among other things, the functioning of the 57th Subsistence Section assigned by the CSIR command for the needs of the Italian Air Force.

It was necessary to reduce food rations for certain basic necessities and only at the end of January resolved even with air support of military procurement problems, was able to recover the amount of food provided.

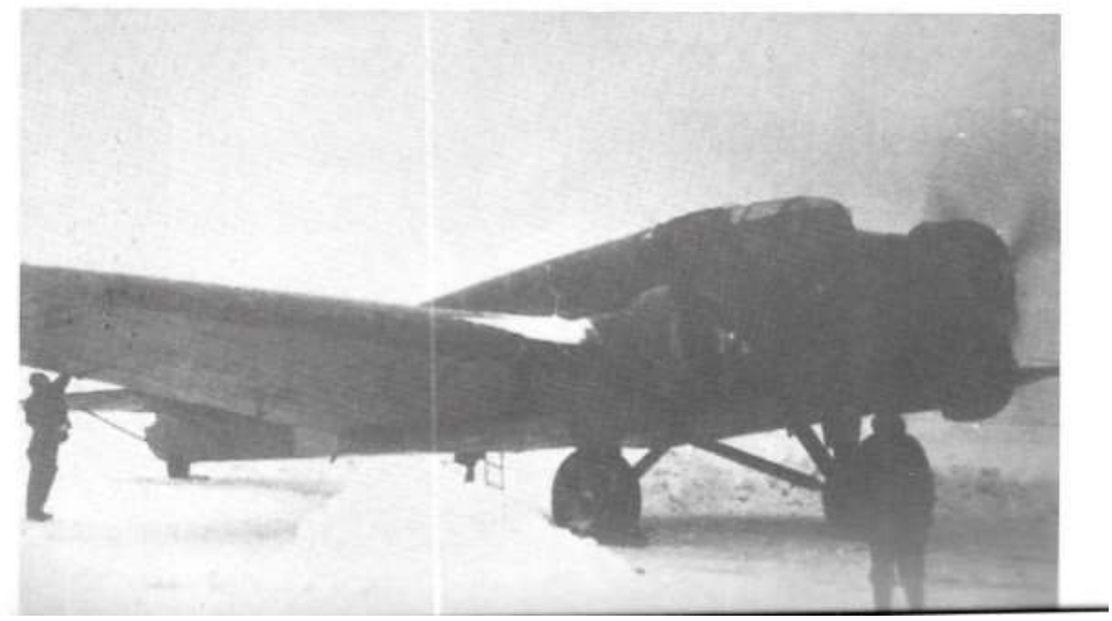
Equal difficulty was necessary to solve for winter special clothing picked up at the distribution centers of Jasi and Dniepropetrowsk and thanks to a few emergency trips with transport squadrons, the necessary warm clothing was possible to promptly start to units of the 1st line to resist Russian winter weather.

The use even by Italian part of the great Stalino airport- ex home to an important V.V.S. school of flight - facilitated aircraft movements for the presence of a paved runway, and on November 9 the 371st Sqd. CT could move from Kriwoj Rog in the forward base of Stalino to operate more effectively, followed a few days later by the 119th Sqd. reconnaissance.

Serious difficulties had to instead pass the convoy with the material of the two squadrons that took two weeks to slowly cover in very serious difficulties - snow, ice, road blocks, technical and physical causes - 300 km. that divided the unit stores from Stalino. Also occurred some cases freezing the limbs and face in the staff starkly exposed to the elements.

The war activities of the two advanced squadrons was instead assured with the airlift of the first use material including aviation gasoline guaranteed by 245th Sqd.T.[449]

With the ice and snow of the three-engined SM. 81 of the 245th and 246th Sqd T. ensure the people of CSIR the needs to live, survive and fight the Russian winter.



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An MC 200 in tactical support to the 3rd Bersaglieri Regiment operating in Ukraine The 22nd Group CT supported numerous and victorious clashes with Soviet fighters.

The newly formed 246th Sqd.T performed six trips between Stalino and Dniepropetrowsk and Poltawa transporting in the winter in the needed material (clothing, furs, shoes, gloves) and to return wounded and frozen. Many trips carried out by the 245th Sqd. T.

The two T. squadrons, connecting on several occasions over the towns of Bucharest with Stalino, touching on the way the Woroschilowgrad airports, Tazinskaja, Mariupol, Katchary, Lipowskj, Raschiajov, Perlowskaja.

In late November, the stretch in front manned by the CSIR was about 60 km., and was confined between the 17th Army and the 49th Alpen kps.

The German attack on the USSR and the world strategic balance disturbance with the push towards the east, had as counterpart "unnatural" logical alliance between Britain and the USSR and the immediate application of certain defensive measures to ensure important strategic interests common in the Middle East jointly implemented in Iraq and Syria at first by the British and later by the Russians in Iran, when in August 1941 the British and Soviet forces who proceeded by mutual agreement the occupation of the Persian nation of great strategic importance for its geographical and economic position also for large oilfields existing there.[450]

Gen. Lohr visit a Cant. 1007Bis of cinematic Sec. of the G.S./ RA posted on the Russian front for the war filming. The air force of the CSIR had to overcome serious difficulties to operate in the USSR.

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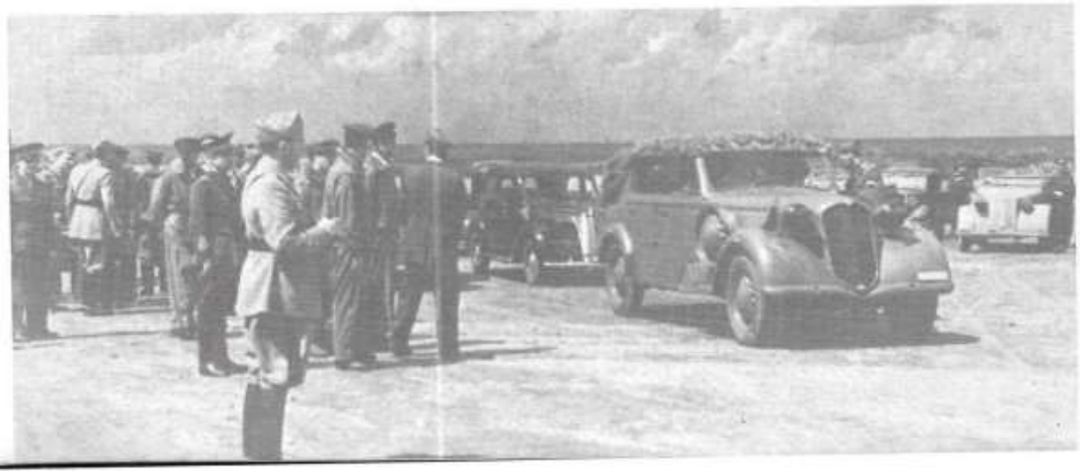
Maj. Giovanni Borzoni commander of the 22nd Group autonomous CT ordered with 4 squadrons of MC. 200. The Macchi aircraft in 1941 represented the most modern Italian air force fighter.

On September 17 it was completed and occupied Tehran Iran's occupation from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf, barring the way to a possible German threat through the Caucasus and ensuring that submissions contained with naval bases in the Indian Ocean, the ability to draw on local oil resources and pour in through time for the USSR, the great war supplies that the United States is preparing to hand over to the Soviets after, Russia extended the possibilities materials provided by the Lend and Lease Law, a providential opportunity logistics through Iran which provided Stalin a good 5 million of tons of weapons, aircraft, munitions, US military equipment.

As they began to flock in style supplies by the US across Iran, the Caspian Sea and India and is limited to certain times of the year even through Alaska, the allies enacted the first practical direct contribution to the Soviet effort, relocating to the area of Arkhangelsk a number of RAF fighter squadrons Hurricane, Spitfire and Curtiss P.40, necessary to defend the routes of the Arctic convoys from England and the United States, these planes that were subsequently ceded to Soviet aviation.

Even the de Gaullist French air force decided to participate symbolically in the war against Germany constituting a fighter group - the "Normandie" - this project went well after a series of meetings held in 1941 with the Soviet authorities. But only in 1942 the French unit will be completed and trained in the USSR to take action against the Germans.[451]

The first aviation logistics column of the CSIR reaches Krivoj Rug from the rear base of Tudora. Serious difficulties were overcome to reach the units in the line the necessary supplies.



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Italian soldiers observe a LaGG. 3 fighter shot down in combat by fighters of the 22nd Group CT.. The Russian aircraft of modern conceptions was flying at 560 km/h and was armed with one 20 mm and 3 machine guns

On November 17, 1941, in the 24th anniversary of the October Revolution, Stalin speaking to the Russian people announcing the death in battle of 350,000 soldiers and 1,020,000 wounded and the loss of a great extension of Soviet territory with 35 million inhabitants; two days later in a speech to the German people, Hitler announced in turn the results obtained by the Wehrmacht against the USSR: 7 million men among the dead, wounded, prisoners, 27,000 guns, 22,000 tanks, 15,000 planes and concluded by saying that: "... now the Soviet Union could be considered a shattered giant."

In reality, outside of propaganda figures indeed very close to the truth, the USSR had lost 36% of cultivated land, 33% of grain production, 55% coal, 60% of iron and steel, 30% of the industrial equipment and other serious dangers were manifested for the remaining production.

The most positive aspect obtained by the USSR in a few months time from the German attack, had been the great transfer of most of the factories beyond the Urals and to safe from any potential German threat. But the situation was very serious and only a miracle could save the Soviet Union from the Reich's power determined to destroy the USSR and Bolshevism.

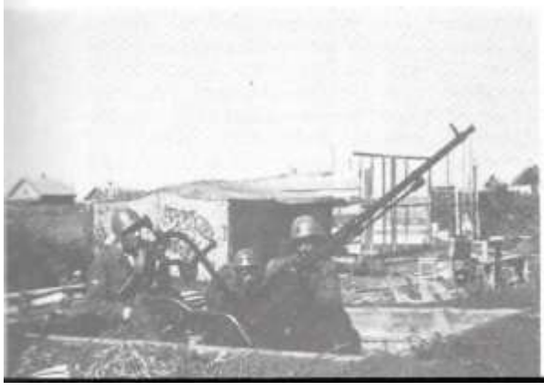
In mid-December the German front stretched from Rostov in the Sea of Azov to the south, in Kharkov on the Volga, in Kalanin in the central area, to Tikhuin to the north near Leningrad encircled on three sides and the Germanic armored vanguards less than 100 km. from Moscow (just 35 km.).

It was the maximum penetration achieved by the Wehrmacht before the winter definitely blocked any further offensive activities.

The first German Army defeats in Russia, were paid for with the removal of some of the most prestigious commanders of the Heere, "guilty" of refusing to accept without challenge the Fuhrer directives, among them Field Marshal von Rundstedt, Gen. Guderian - German premier army tank expert -and Marshal von Brauchtisch of the OKW Staff.

Since the beginning of 1942 the Fuhrer personally assumed supreme command of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front and the whole set of the OKW strategy was again questioned by the clear desire of Hitler to personally issue directives and orders to be executed to the letter.[452]

A Scotti / I.F. 20 auto-cannon to the defense of Kiev airfield aviation headquarters of the CSIR. To meet the transportation needs to the front lines was formed 245th Sqd T.



Col. Carlo Drago commander of the CSIR air force accompanies a visiting senior official Romanian Air Force aircraft to the cinematic flight sect. (Cant. 1007Bis/MC.200).

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A German pilot of a "Storch" who recover an Italian pilot that parachuted after combat with Soviet fighters and wounded in the clash.

It was also distorted the strategy of air war since the Luftwaffe that had pursued until then the conquest of the air superiority and domination of the sky, turned into a tool for intervention essentially tactical function, not so much applied in the tested air-to-ground collaboration theories of Blitz Krieg-so positively proven in the past -how depending on the use of close dependence and compliance with the directives of the Army, with the result of grinding the organic unity of the units to respond widely to multiple tactical requirements, wear down the staff and equipment costs, soon reduced Wings to modest entities and flight groups. The same negative results experienced in 1940-41 in Libya by the 5th Air Fleet of the R.A., to the directives imposed by Supercomando ASI. Among the Red Army units were present 3 Airborne Corps and other special units of the Guard for a total of 90,000 men (ABON) composed of paratroopers and airborne brigades, artillery units, engineering, services, transport, which were used clumsily and soon be destroyed. In September, Stalin insisted again with Churchill for the opening of a new front in the west, an aspect that the British Prime Minister still thought impossible and offered in exchange for the Soviet desire about sending to Russia 25-30 British divisions, a intensified air offensive on Germany and more quantities of military supplies.

In early October they had arrived in the USSR with British convoys departing every 10 days: 193 fighters, 140 heavy tanks, 200 light, 250 AT guns and they were leaving another 200 fighter aircraft and 280 tanks while another 45 came from Canada to Vladivostok along with 3000 trucks.

Military plans in common were discussed in Moscow between the STAVKA and Gen. Wavell accompanied by Gen. Paget, and the USSR kept asking persistently for other Allied material, while Stalin complained on several occasions that many materials including airplanes, came damaged due to improper packaging and proposed the transfer in flight of entire units. On several occasions Churchill reiterated to Stalin the substantial difference existing policy between the USSR and Great Britain-United States, except that Stalin gave the impression of not essential to feel the spirit of the new covenant.

In early 1942 the aircraft deliveries by sending long-range bombers and fighter escort of large range were changed to protect Allied convoys sailing from England and from Iceland to Russia, a decision motivated by the heavy losses suffered by the Arctic - North Sea convoys by the absence of an effective security organization from the Soviets.[453]

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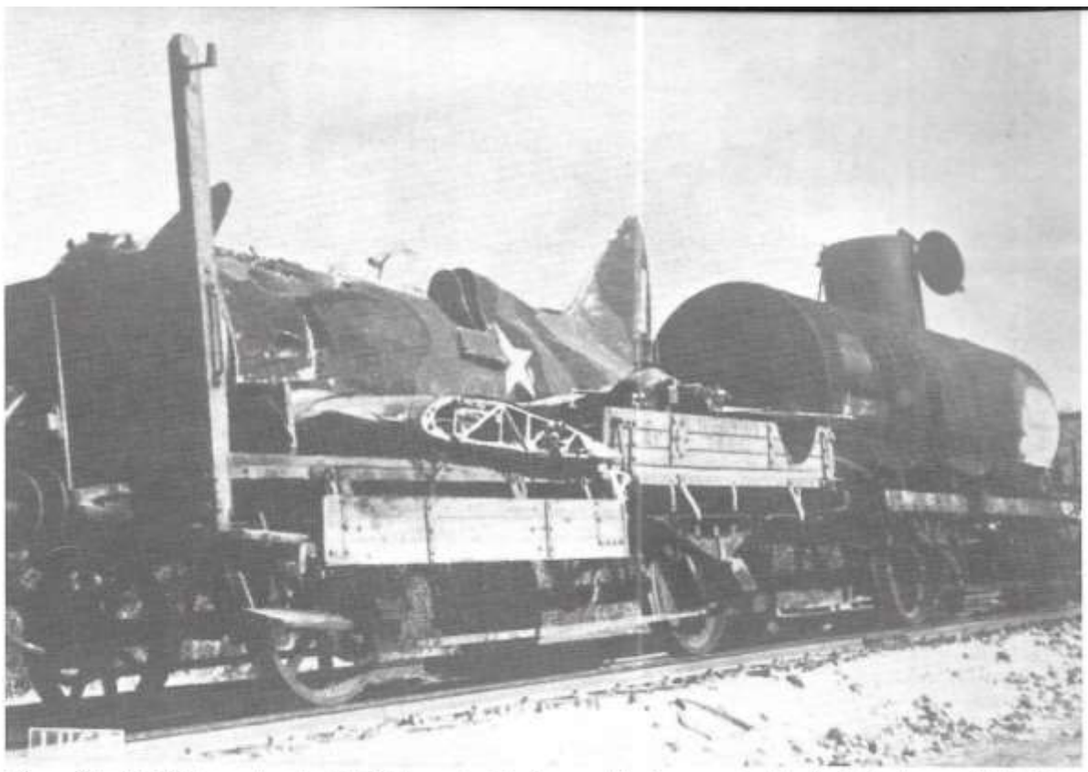

A Super Rata I-16 fighter captured by the CSIR on a train in the operational area assigned to the Italian troops. In the first months of the war the Soviet Union suffered heavy losses in men, material, armaments.

Regarding this protection problem, W. Churchill proposed sending 6 RAF groups to Russia to contribute to this protection, a request which was however rejected by Stalin who sent a reinforcement of 58 torpedo bombers and 200 fighters, 50 of which were long-range, to the Murmansk-Archangel sector.

Undoubtedly there had been by the German gross errors of judgment especially in the absence of the military and industrial potential of the USSR, serious political miscalculations and obtaining presumption of decisive results before the winter came, with the result that the inappropriate German army equipment caused serious losses for freezing and technical failures to the entire OKW apparatus.

From the Soviets prevailed the strategic concept of retreat without great contrast of forces not to favor the German Blitz Krieg, in wear down the opponent by harassing him continuously and then attack him when he was deeply penetrated into Soviet territory and was in serious logistical and technical difficulties, environmental, climate and moral.

To this add after the great human resources of Russia, one of General Staff prepared professionally, the determination with which they fought the soldiers and Soviet citizens, the unexpected and rapid transformation of two armies of armored cavalry insufficiently evaluated by the OKW, abundance war material of modern conceptions able to keep up with the best German war materials and finally the uninterrupted influx of aid provided by the United States and England (440 Spitfire and Hurricane fighters supplied in November 1941) whose contribution, even qualitatively, it was instrumental in creating the conditions of the Soviet levied. It began from that final glimpse of the 1941 crisis that would gradually lead to the defeat of the Reich!

At 1 Dec. 1941 the balance of forces deployed by Russia and Germany appeared as follows:

	USSR	GERMANY
Soldiers mobilized	4,190,000	5,092,000
Tanks	1,984	1,453
Aircraft	3,688	2,465[454]

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Intrigued Italian airmen observe a Soviet tank type BT 7 of 14 Tons. captured in the CSIR sector. The strength of the Russian Army was underestimated by OKW Intelligence Service.

To the approximately 15,000 aircraft destroyed by the Germans in 6 months of battle (on 22 June alone 1,811 airplanes of all types were destroyed, 1,489 on the ground and 322 in combat) had to be contrasted the 2,951 lost by the Luftwaffe up to 8 April 1942 to which another 1,997 damaged airplanes had to be added.

The Soviet air force suffered heavy losses were in part replaced with aircraft production in 1941 amounted 15,735 airplanes of all kinds built, many of which, however, the old model, whereas new types of aircraft added up to just over 8,000 specimens including: 1562 assault "Stormovik"Il.2, 1354 Yak.1 .and 2467 LaGG.3.

The loss of over 600 industrial complexes involved among other things a slowdown in aircraft production that passed from 1807 aircraft of July to September 2329 before declining suddenly just 627 airplanes in November.

Just over 6000 aircraft were produced in the second half of 1941.

THE WINTER WAR IN RUSSIA

On November 12, the 371st Sqd. CT (Capt. Enrico Meille) was assigned to the CSIR command and intended to ease Russian pressure on Nikitowka positions held by the 80th Inf. Regiment reinforced by a group of 75/27 of the 8th artillery Regiment, for several days surrounded by units of the Russian 174th Div. For several days the low-flying Macchi C.200 machine-gunned enemy positions by implementing even throwing bombs 50 kg. after affixing to the fighter aircraft Angeloni wing mounts which falls essential to broaden the range of applications because of the absence of assault types very useful on the eastern front. The missions were extended throughout the course of the short day to the point that on several occasions it was necessary to illuminate the Stalino runway with the vehicles headlights to facilitate landings.

On the 13th Gen. Messe sent to Col. Drago a laudatory message reads: "I extend to you live praise, worthy and brilliant commander, and the brave crews that these days, with strafing and bombing very effective and with numerous and difficult transport, have largely contributed our success weapons. Praise particularly squadron commanded Captain Meille for membership given action magnificent troops, momentum and demonstrated self-sacrifice. Gen. Messe."

In late November, the air force of the CSIR was distributed along 400 km of territory and divided into three landing fields while most of the material was still set aside on the logistics base of Tudora to over 1000 km. of distance. The units were so spread:[455]

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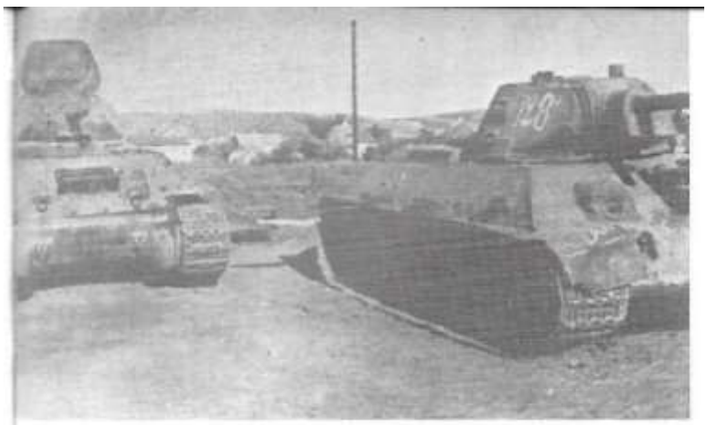

The first T-34 tanks captured by soldiers of the CSIR. The soviet tanks was considered among the best armored vehicles of the 2nd WW for convenience, armament and technical efficiency.

Saporoshje: CSIR Aviation Command, Intendenza, 22nd Group CT Command with 3 squadrons and the 128th Sdq. OA;

Stalino: 62nd Group OA Command and 119th Sqd. with 371st Sqd. CT;

Kriwoi Rog: Technical Service and 34th Sqd. OA;

Tudora: Warehouses of Intendenza with ordinary material and M.S.A. (Particular respect, equipment, tools, Section spare aviation engines, fuel-lubricant depots, ammunition, materials, field, fleet). Staff about 500 soldiers and militarized workers O.T.;

Bucharest-Baneasa: SRAM rear base for multi-engine repairs and technical-logistical base for the field deposition.

The axis length of 1600 km - over deployment between the Stalino stronghold and Bucharest - was creating serious logistical problems for the CSIR because of transport difficulties (European gauge transformation of the Russian railway system), unavailability of rolling stock, 90% used by the Germans, lack of staff for manpower, deplorable state of the roads to the fund and weather conditions, mud, snow and ice.

These serious difficulties were put in serious crisis also perfect German organization and fuel allocations were reduced by the excessive consumption of logistics convoys between the loading-unloading terminals and the failure by the influx of supplies centers.

Between December 1941 and March 1942 the minimum temperatures recorded by the Italian aviation personnel of the CSIR, included -24° centigrade in December, -30° in January, -20° in February, -22° in March, these temperatures that may have value if compared with the maximum oscillating between -15°/-22° to judge in such living conditions was necessary to operate and fly in Russia in the winter of 1941-42.

At these temperatures froze the oil of engines and weapons, were manifested numerous and severe cases of frostbite and gangrene, it was often impossible to defend for technical inefficiency of the aircraft armament, including particularly vulnerable appeared to Italian non-designed and suitable to the service in these demanding applications.

The command headquarters of CSIR Aviation at Stalino. In the initial phase of operations the 22nd Group CT was assigned to the operational dependencies of the 4th Luftflotte/5th Fl. kps

To remedy the unforeseen difficulties that is new to Italians airmen to operate at temperatures below 20°, it was necessary to resort to the help and experience of the Luftwaffe, which provided a number of Winkel hot air preheaters apparatuses (50 specimens) to enable the setting in motion of the motors with long and difficult operations often negative; to add after what the operating difficulties of the on-board hydraulic circuits that are blocked by the cold, mechanical devices paralyzed by ice found at higher altitudes, in case of no leakage of the carriages, locking arms, the 1st and 2nd degree frostbite who suffered at the ground specialists and pilots in flight sitting absurdly in open cockpit of the Macchi, in conditions even more severe and debilitating than those experienced by fighters of the CAI with the G.50 and the CR.42, the poor visibility of the ice-encrusted windshield, the inefficiency of interments and shooting.[456]

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A Winkel heater enters warm air into the engines of an SM. 81 of the 245th Sqd T (Capt. Ernesto Caprioglio) It was necessary to move 3 T squadrons to meet the needs of the CSIR.

Yet in those impossible conditions of life, Italians airmen worked, suffered, fought and died to protect and defend the infantry clinging to the frozen ground and impossible to dig, with cold jammed weapons, with the modest available weaponry.

Quite different the situation of Russians accustomed to such temperatures, with equipment and armament of simpler conceptions and more effective, with garments that can withstand the intense cold, camouflaged for use in snow covered areas, capable of working in extreme conditions of weather, and then with further particularly offensive and defensive ability.

In December, occurred the battle of Chazeptowka with temperatures -30° c and another fight began on December 25 in the day a snow storm wrapped in a white, icy mantle men and machines of the 61st Group O.A. - there occurred numerous cases of freezing and mechanical drawbacks for ice.

Christmas - in the localities of Sasypnaja, Orlowa-Iwanowka and Michailowka, which defended the road to Stalino, and which resisted Russian pressure until the German panzers and paratroopers of the 2nd Regiment (Col. Sturm) arrived to reverse the situation, subsequently counterattacked by large Russian forces supported by the air force, which blocked them together with the Italian soldiers.

In the Christmas battle, after a long period of forced inactivity for impossible flight conditions, Italians airmen returning to work on urgent request to hold the enemy pressure also manifested in the area of Michailowka attacked by two Soviet divisions - the 35th and 296th - and defended by units of the "Torino".

From Stalino took off the 359th CT Sqd. (Cap. Giorgio Jannicelli) which had relieved the 371st which had returned to Saporoshje, and in two hard fights with the Po.I-16s shot down two «Rata» on Christmas Day; on the 28th new fight and downing of another 9 aircraft between SB.2 and Po.I-16; another 3 were brought down by fire from the Army's 20/65 machine guns.

Winter 1941-42 showed particularly hard putting a severe test men and machine and interrupting often for technical reasons the connections for service difficulties related to the type of construction of the three-engined SM.81.

The difficulties of setting in motion the engines of the Macchi - 3 fighter only of the had been enabled to take off to participate in combat, would have inevitably caused the numerical disproportion that unfortunately had a decisive role in the subsequent fighting on 29 December with the death commander of the 369th Sqd. CT.[457]

A snow storm wrapped in a white, icy mantle men and machines of the 61st Group OA.. There occurred many cases of frostbite and mechanical problems for ice.

Bearskin hats in fur and warm clothing for aviators of the CSIR. Lieut. Col. Chierighini Commander 61st Group OA with a group of pilots and Army officers observers.

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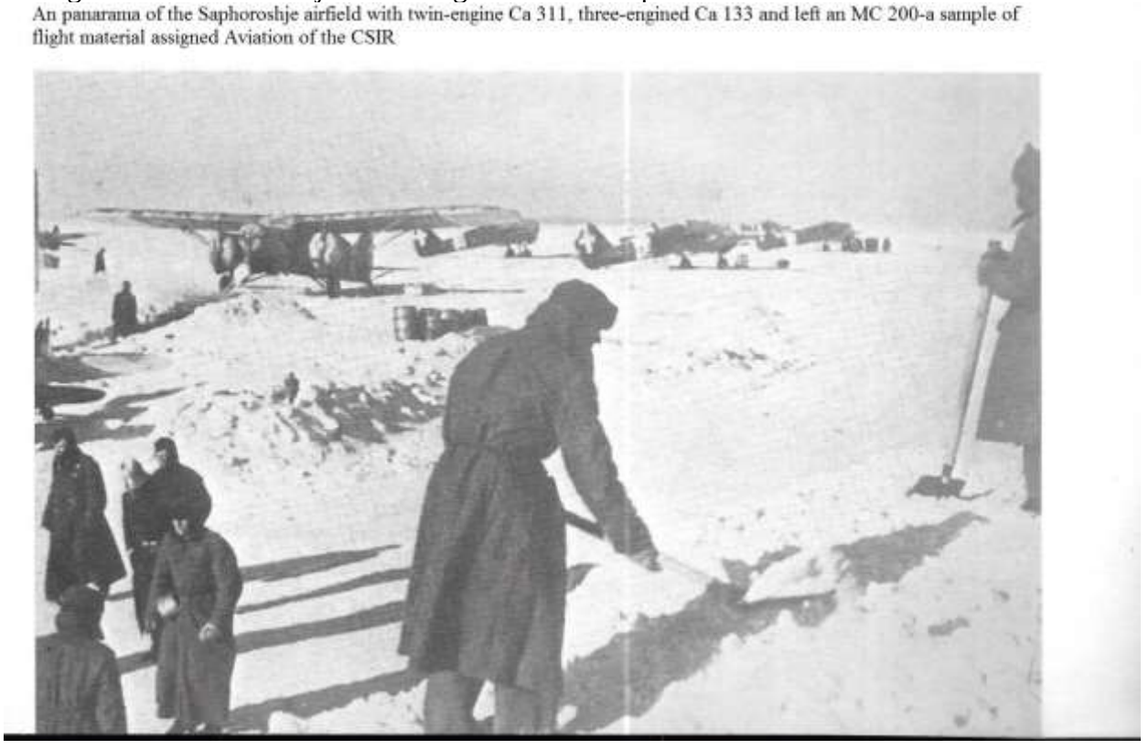
Capt. Giorgio Jannicelli the 22nd Group CT killed in actionon December 28, 1941 and decorated with the M.Ovm. The collision occurred in a serious numerical disproportion for Italian pilots.

On December 28 Soviet aircraft bombed Petropawlowka defended by Bersaglieri, infantry, Italian artillery and German Fallschirmjager, while to the south and north Divisions "Torino" and "Pasubio" contained the Russian attacks in Ploskij, Mogila Ostraja, Nowo Orlowka. The entire CSIR was engaged in battle!

On the 29th another air battle in the Bowolin area between the Macchis of the 22nd Group and the Soviet fighters escorting the attack bombers. In the clash, Capt. pilot 'Giorgio Jannicelli, commander of the 369th Sqd., died. After having shot down a bomber and machine-gunned numerous enemy fighters, he was fatally hit and fell in flames in the unequal fight sustained by the few Macchis against superior enemy forces. He was decorated with M.O.v.m. for his brave behavior. The very low temperature had not allowed a greater number of aircraft to participate in the mission, due to difficulties in starting the engines. The CSIR command in Jassimowataja also suffered heavy bombing by the Soviet Air Force together with the adjacent railway line, resulting in damage with deaths and injuries among the command personnel.[458]

An panarama of the Saphoroshje airfield with twin-engine Ca 311, three-engined Ca 133 and left an MC 200-a sample of flight material assigned Aviation of the CSIR



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The "Christmas Battle" ended on December 31 after fierce fighting and other fallen that cost to Italians and Germans more than 1,300 dead, which added to the 633 suffered hitherto from CSIR along with 2,410 wounded, 225 missing and 3,614 frozen, represented until then the blood contribution made by Italy in the gigantic struggle which began on June 22, 1941 on the eastern front.

In six months of the war the CSIR had traveled 1500 km largely marching on foot, it had captured 16,700 prisoners, 16 guns, 13 mortars, 5,000 rifles, 510 light machine guns-machine guns, 60 vehicles, 500 tanks, 1,000 horses.

In January 1942, the OKW could make a first detailed examination of Soviet aviation situation, and ensure "visually" on the basis of reality found in the USSR, the real substance of airpower and contrasting reliability of the information gleaned regarding them from the Abwher, as has happened, unfortunately, at other times, "Battle of Britain", Crete, and so on.

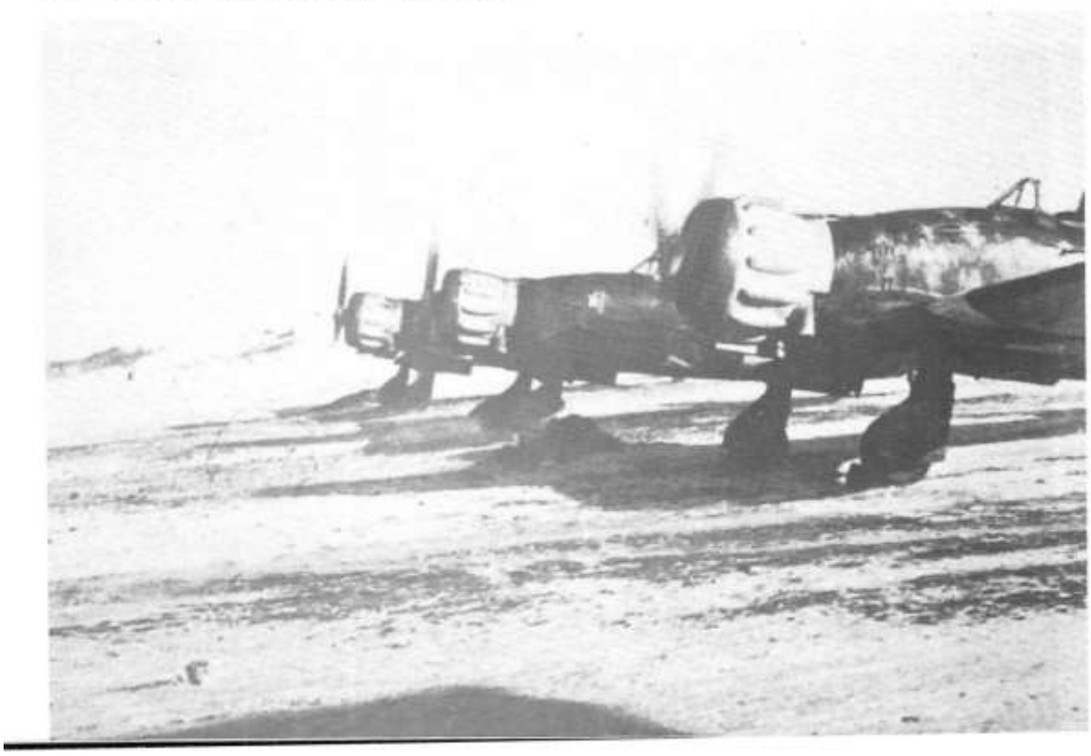
From the data in our possession and the number of aircraft found abandoned, destroyed or shot down on the airfields of European Russia, it appears that 1,500 aircraft out of approximately 19,000 present on the territory of the USSR were eliminated, including 8,700 1st line aircraft and 6,500 trainer aircraft.

The increase for new productions and Allied supplies in the second half of 1941 was of 6,395 aircraft with the result that at the beginning of 1942 were still available to the V.V.S. 7300 aircraft in large part to new production, divided into 1,325 fighters, 615 bombers, 290 various aircraft, 5,070 aircraft for instruction.

With such force available to it, the STAVKA had newly renovated sorting in anticipation units to report soon with production underway and the promised Allied aid, the efficiency of the Air Regiment to the expected levels.

The 200 aviation Regiments of erroneously assessed by the Àbwehr and the SIM in 1941, they had proved far more numerous than expected since the report prepared by the OKW in the beginning of the 1942 total ascended on more accurate information about 500, of which 467 confirmed on the western front and distributed as follows:[459]

Patrol taking off alarm. On Christmas Day 1941, and at the end of the year, there were violent ground fighting and clashes in the skies between Italian of the CSIR and Russian soldiers.



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	Bomb.	Ftr.	Ass.	Recon.	Mis	Total
southern sector	43	109	33	1	30	216
center sector	43	54	19	5	37	158
north sector	18	27	5	4	27	81
Finland Sector	4	5	-	1	2	12
Total	108	195	57	11	96	461

The Russian winter counteroffensive under the able guidance of Gen. Zhukov obtained the desired success, rejected the Germans from the outskirts of Moscow, caused the Wehrmacht over 500,000 losses, with 2,500 guns, 1,300 tanks, 15,000 vehicles and procured the first OKW disappointment since the beginning of "Barbarossa".

Throughout the counter-offensive there had been a launch mass of 2,500 paratroopers of the 8th Airborne Brigade from four engine TB.3 together under the command of the 4th ABON of Gen. Levashov, followed after a certain period of time by other 6,500 paratroopers of the 2nd, 9th and 14th Brigades. The operation was unsuccessful most because of the slow and outdated Antonov, which was knocked down by the Flak and the German fighters and the few paratroopers arrived on the ground were scattered in the vast area in which they were launched.

The January 18, 1942 the 245th, 246th and 247th squadrons T. (the latter newly formed) were assigned organically to the 18th Stormo T while remaining detached to the Eastern Front for the needs of the CSIR. The 247th, last in order of arrival in Russia, included the wanton tri-motor SM. 81/SM.73, the latter in the passenger transport version, as coming from Soc. Ala Littoria.

Between January and March 1942, the opposite was stagnant except for surprise attacks, to patrol activities, reconnaissance and surveillance cruises on sight. They occurred some Soviet bombers in raids Woroschilowa, Nowo Orlowka, Rykowo as a prelude to the Russian attacks that were manifested on January 18 to 19 on Woroschilowa, which was abandoned and retaken with heavy losses; on January 20 Nikolajewka another strong Soviet counter offensive attack Zhukov and finally again Nowo Orlowka hit by continuous strafing of "Rata" who support the Russian infantry launched the attack positions held by Italian Bersaglieri and German paratroopers.

In 1942, the CSIR underwent a restructuring in independent battle groups (Kampfgruppe) as suggested by the Germans, while there had been some rotations of commanders: Gen. Lerici took over the command of the "Torino", Col. Pilot Carlo Drago was to depart for Italy on February 26, 1941 leaving the CSIR Aviation command to Gen. BA Enrico Pezzi, while as troop reinforcements were sent to the CSIR, the 6th Bersaglieri Regiment, the 120th motorized artillery Regiment and the “Monte Cervino” Alpine skiers Battalion.

Between end-December 1941 and mid February 1942 the abundant snowfall on the fields, the poor visibility, ice and low temperatures oscillating about -35°, blocked long the reduced flight activity only possible a few days, thanks to the use and cooperation of the other soldiers of the CSIR and particularly of Engineers, which with different systems, almost all improvised for lack of appropriate equipment and expertise about, made the airfields viable, shoveled over 100,000 cubic meters of frozen snow on the runway of Stalino making antiskid with soil and sand, and this invaluable collaboration allowed the execution of certain direct offensive missions against the Kranyi Ljman airport from which frequently departed Soviet aircraft for bombing and strafing in the CSIR area.

Offensive missions, coordinated with the recognition provided by the 61st Group, which had shown signs on the airfield of a number of Russian aircraft, were performed by the 22nd Group CT on 4 and 5 February with two formations – offensive - protective - which alternately machine-gunned the airport destroying on the ground 10 airplanes and damaging others.

The attack caused Soviet fighters to take off and engage in combat with the Macchis, but suffered 5 kills.[460]

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Again on February 24 the improved weather conditions (+ 6°/ -5° c) allow for a new interception mission of SB.2 bombers escorted by Po.I-17 two of which were shot down by MC.200.

One of our fighters was hit and damaged landing with landing gear retracted and without consequences for the pilot rescued by our soldiers.

On 28 February new combat between 14 Macchi and a dozen 17-Po.I intent to attack German bombers remained isolated. 2 Soviet aircraft were shot down in flames without loss by the pilots of the 22nd Fighter Group, at whose command had been appointed interim charge, replacing Maj. Borzoni repatriated to Italy, Maj. Giuseppe D'Agostinis.

In April, despite continued intense alternating cold machine guns, began the thaw that was the most crippling aspect of combat, since transformed the few roads and tracks dirt into a huge muddy stream often up to a meter, which inexorably blocked the vehicles even slowing the movement of tracked vehicles.

Among the connection aircraft of the CSIR they had as a replacement increments of 2 Ca.164 lost, 2 twin-engine Ca.312 more suitable for use on the Russian front and 2 Fi.156 ceded by the Luftwaffe for special needs of the CSIR ground commands.

In Italy was readied in the meantime an entire Army – the 8th - destined to the Russian front, with the obvious purpose of numerically rebalanced the Italian presence with Romanian Hungarian, and Finnish participation,. One aspect demagogic and purely political because even this great unit composed entirely of Inf. and Alpine Div., left without transport would be armed and equipped with the standard Italian Army armament.

It was simply this worrying anticipation made the CSIR, to understand that this new army being formed would follow the fate of all other Great infantry units which, while fighting valiantly but with serious and insurmountable technological handicap, had fought in Libya and no luck in East Africa, Greece and Albania. Gen. Messe openly expressed his disagreement in this regard.

In March the 4th Luftflotte Command again and urgently requested the CSIR tactical allocation of 22nd Group CT to meet the Soviet offensive on the front of the 17th Army/Panzer Army, who had progressed to about 80 km to the west and reaching Barvenkova Lozovaja - 100 km NE of the CSIR positions.

The 22nd fighter Group at whose command had been destined finally Maj. De Agostinis, was assigned to the Tactical Command of Nah Kampf Fuhrer of Stalino and used primarily for escort of Ju.87 and Ju.88 bombers of St.G.77 and KG.3, partly transferred as reinforcement from the 8th Fl. Kps. of Luftflotte 2.

On March 9, the MC.200 escorting 11 Ju.87 attacked a mixed formation of fighter-bombers shooting down 3. On March 15, another clash with killing of two Soviet fighters attempting to attack the Stukas escorted by Italian aviators. On March 17 combined action with the Bf.109 of JG.54 in Ja.Bo. version and Luskotowa airport attack by destroying on the ground a dozen aircraft.

In the days March 22 to 23 new combat with Soviet fighters during escort missions to German reconnaissance and killing without any loss of five Russian aircraft. A Macchi hit landed without landing gear in friend zone and the pilot was saved. Damaged the plane was recovered. On March 30 in a clash between 9 MC.200 and an enemy formation of 12 fighter, 4 of which were definitely killed and two others injured.

The 22nd of the same month, the new commander of the CSIR Air Force in Gen. Pezzi at the head of a squadron of 6 Ca.311, attacked Russian troops in established in the Olikowatka area. In the spring of 1942 the GS/A sent to the CSIR a detached flying cinematic section directly from Superaereo but managing the "P" squadron (Maj. De Siena). The section consisted of 2 MC.200 (Lt. C. M. Ruspoli –Sgt. Carabelli) and Cant.1007 Bis (MM.23369) Lt. Mazzoni equipped to shoot with the planimetric Nistri. This special section to the technical and professional employed by the Capt. Marcellini - cinematographic director - He had the task of filming the war events on various fronts, participating in combat missions with units of the 1st line: bombers, torpedo bombers, fighters, reconnaissance recovering "live action" the different phases of the action to draw motives useful for technical purposes, and war propaganda.[461]

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In the spring of 1942, the Lt. Ruspoli carrying out with his MC.200 a film shooting on behalf of CS1R command in Kamensk area, was attacked by several I.16 fighters called by radio commands from the ground and engaged in spirited battles albeit obvious conditions of inferiority, managing to shoot down two "Rata" but coming to be hit in the engine by the shot of a ground station and forced to crash-land within our lines or better in the sector held by Romanian troops, landing that ended with no damage to the pilot and a few drawbacks to the aircraft that was dismantled and transported to Stalino for repairs.

The cinematic MC.200 of Ruspoli returned with the attentions of the Romanians who had aid, taking into account for the Romanian aviation area and the port of Odessa just as the city was attacked by Soviet bombers. But all was well with him.

In March the 22nd Group CT took place, an intense activity with the execution of free fighter missions, surveillance and protection in the area of the CSIR, in order to prevent attacks that the Russian air force carried out with some frequency on the commands, warehouses and stores as well as on the important Stalino airport.

In April occurred new Russian bombers on raids in the days Stalino 5th, 7th and 29th and they were destroyed a Ca.133/T and a Ca.164 connection biplane; 3 Ca.311 were damaged along with accumulated materials. There were 2 deaths and 8 injuries among field personnel.

A tribute on the activity and initiative of our aviators was directed by Gen. Hoth commanding the 17th Army under the command of the CSIR, and Gen. Messe wanted to add his words of praise addressed to the 22nd Fighter Group brilliant protagonists of the events, many of which were decorated with the German iron cross.

Very valuable in Russia was the work of rescue, sorting and transport the wounded from the front lines to the back lines carried out by transport aircraft and more than medical ones, considering the state of the rough and difficult roads that would certainly not have offered to patients the necessary guarantees physical caution so as to avoid further complications, objectively considering the presence in the CSIR at least 10 field hospitals and related specialized units and[462]

Starting by Italians aviators in the hard Russian winter with serious technical and physical difficulties proved pilots flying Macchi with the opened cockpit in the rigid temperatures encountered in the sky.

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A German halftrack model Demag Sd Kp, 250/1 with PAK 37/45 antitank gun hit and destroyed by Soviet fire, exposed the curiosity of Italian sharpshooters.

5 large rearward hospitals in Hungary (Marmaros, Szigeti and Romania (Gura Hormolni), Suceava and Botosani, where the wounded were being initiated for the repatriation, as well as the Health Sections of a second eviction of Dniepropetrowsk and Pervomajsk where injured arrived by air, underwent a second medical-surgical care and they were then sorted by rail to the rearward hospitals.

The shift of operations in the Donets Basin and the influx of a large number of wounded from the front lines, imposed the establishment of an intervention center Jusovka (Stalino), where transport planes passed them between Dniepropetrowsk and Pervomajsk.

Just as freezing winter of 1941-42 there were 3,614 cases and 1,600 were injured; much of these personnel were transported by air with a maximum limit of 6 hours from the time of injury for the most serious cases, in order to avoid as far as possible lethal solutions.

Among the numerous doctors of the CSIR staff it should be mentioned also the unit of 45 CRI volunteer nurses who played a commendable and valuable service.

Another important aspect CSIR was played by aviation transport of post - unique placed between the distant soldiers and families - and that service which the soldiers were holding particular, was widely recognized and praised on several occasions by the commander of the CSIR and the command of the Intendenza, who wanted to write in the CSIR Aviation command a significant point:

"... For merit and virtue of the Air Force today we are closer to Italy and to our loved ones; and this, in addition to being a special comfort to our hearts, allowing us in the handling of our very frequent contact activities with the higher authorities. We all know what this means for the Air Force personnel, especially in the volatile situation that you cross, with winds and frequent lightning: means efforts, labors, daily sacrifices.

We are therefore deeply grateful to our comrades, who do not pay for the effort in the rear, now dominate in brilliant company so much of the Italian and Allied front.

To all the comrades of the Azzurra Arm and in particular to the General Commander Pezzi, young and unparalleled, we send our thanks and our best wishes. Gen. Biglino".[463]

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A chaplain, Italian aviation converses with a religious Russian who has jealously preserved for long years the Christian symbols of his faith.

An Italian battery destroyed by a Soviet aircraft attack. On the ground lie TL 37 tractors, Fiat 626 trucks, carriages of 75/27 In war it hits the enemy and you're hit.

4 Oct. 1941 - Welcomed by Col. Drago the Capt. of the GS/RA Gen. Pricolo reaches Kriwoj Rog to inspect the air force of the CSIR. The meeting with the commander of the 4th Air Fleet Gen. Luhr of the Luftwaffe.

Curiosity of Russian peasants for a Italian three-engine. After the assignment of the bases of Tudora and Saporoshje aviation of CSIR moved forward on Stalino and Kriwoj Rog airfields.

A four-engine TB 3 downed by anti-aircraft fire of the CSIR. Despite the heavy losses the Soviet Air Force always proved to be able to react by entering into battle new units arrived from Siberia.

Italian pilots of the 22nd Group CT during a relaxing pause the war on the airfield of Kriwoj Rog You notice the MC. 200 conditioned with the colors of the Russian South front sector.

Gen. Messe in conversation with a senior officer of the aviation CSIR. In most Italian and German commands occasions were able to praise the airmen for their behavior.

WAR ACTIVITY OF THE AIR FORCE/CSIR

(Period 1 Aug. 1941/30 April 1942)

Bombing-Reconnaissance (including flights to transport materials CSIR)

Missions performed (*)	n. 640
Flight hours worked (including Mostar Transfer flight)	n. 1,040
Aircraft used	n. 1,830
Amount of explosives launched	11,500 kg
Enemy aircraft destroyed on the ground	n. 6
Aircraft lost in action	n. 4
Aircraft stricken for accidents (or destroyed on the ground)	n. 4

(*) Including 4 cinematic reconnaissance of Sec. flight of Sqd. P.

Fighter- Bombing (with B.A. aircraft)

Missions carried out (escort-cruises-bombing-strafing)	n. 820
Flight hours worked (including Tirana transfer flight)	n. 1,800
Aircraft used	n. 1,690
Amount of explosives launched	2,400 kg
Bullets fired	n. 130,500
Enemy aircraft destroyed on the ground	n. 18
Enemy aircraft downed (*)	n. 43
Aircraft lost in action	n. 4
Aircraft stricken for accidents (or destroyed on the ground)	n. 8

(*) Including 2 killing by fighters of the cinematic Sec. Sqd of flight. P.

Air transport-links

Missions performed	n. 622
Flight hours worked (including Italy transfer flight)	n. 3,820
aircraft used	n. 1,730
km traveled	n. 320,000
material transported	450,000 kg
Post- baggage carried	120,000 kg
Wounded-frozen-personnel transported	n. 1,800
Aircraft lost in action	n. -
Aircraft stricken (or destroyed on the ground)	n. 4

Personnel: deceased-injured-dispersed

Officers	n. 4
NCOs	n. 5
Graduated specialists- airmen	n. 12
Injuries	n. 21
Aircraft shot down by A/A artillery of the CSIR	n. 6
Aircraft probably downed (aviation- A/A defense)	n. 14

SUMMARY OF WAR ACTIVITY - CSIR

Missions performed	n. 2,082
Flight hours performed	n. 6,660
Aircraft used	n. 5,250
Enemy aircraft destroyed (felled to the ground- A/A defense)	n. 73
Aircraft lost in action	n. 8
Aircraft stricken for accidents (or destroyed on the ground)	n. 16[464]

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CHAPTER – SEVEN
The anti-guerrilla operations in Yugoslavia

The guerrillas in Yugoslavia - The repression in Yugoslavia - The Croat National Aviation - The revolt of Montenegro - Slovenia - Dalmatia Aviation (SLO. DA.) - The Serbian rebellion in Croatia.[465]

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CHAPTER SEVEN
The anti-guerrilla operations in Yugoslavia

THE GUERRILLA WAR IN YUGOSLAVIA

After the end of hostilities in the Balkans which ended with the defeat of Yugoslavia, the new territorial organization of the Balkan country was so ordered: Germany annexed northern Slovenia bordering with the Austrian Styria and the Reich also assumed the trusteeship of Banat East inhabited by Romanian minorities mandated by the Bucharest government. Hungary got a part of Vojvodina, Bulgaria assimilated much of Macedonia, Italy is annexed part of Dalmatia, the cities of Sibenik, Trogir and Spalato, Southern Slovenia with Ljubljana as part of Macedonia was annexed to Albania with the strong disappointment of Bulgaria.

Montenegro was declared an independent state with Italian protectorate for the bonds that united the Queen Elena of Savoy to her country of origin. Serbia had German occupation military although they have a government loyal to the provisions of the Reich headed by General Nedic, and finally there was the nationalist Croatia: The new state grew out of the Yugoslav kingdom, called "Independent State of Croatia" which included the following territories: Croatia, what was left of Slovenia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, the remaining part of Dalmatia.

The new N.D.H. was officially established May 15, 1941 as the Kingdom of Croatia (Hrvatska Nezavisna Drzava), whose crown was nominally assigned to Ajmone Spoleto by nomination of Vittorio Emanuele III, under the name of Tomislav II, although in reality the Italian monarch designated politically never took possession of his throne, nor ever set foot in his kingdom.

At the head of the Croatian government was placed Dr. Ante Pavelic, who took refuge in Italy for many years under the protection of Mussolini with many followers of his nationalist movement called Ustasha, of which he was the recognized Head with the title of Pogavnik and with the battle motto "the Domspreman" (Ready for the Fatherland).

Were regulated with special protocols treated with Italy with the signing of official documents took place in Rome May 18, 1941.

In these treaties they were specified legal, constitutional, political, economic, financial, military and among them military assistance for the education and training of the Croatian Armed Forces (Army, Air Force, Gendarmerie) the Navy was excluded as not specifically contemplated.[466]

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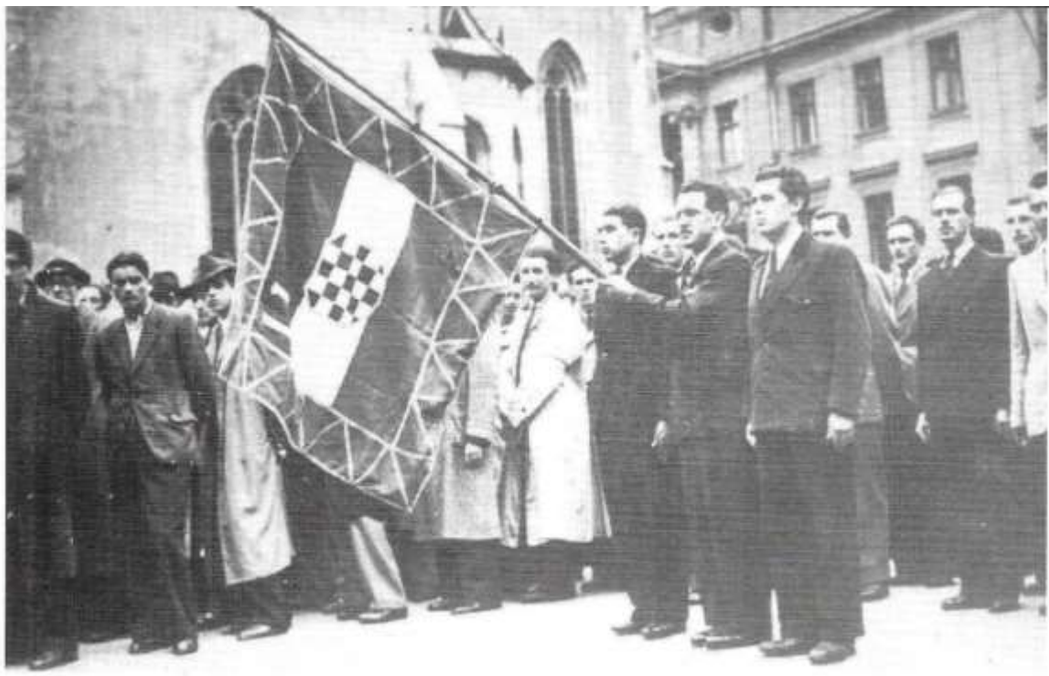

It comes the new independent state of Croatia under Ante Pavelic guide. Soon the Croatian Ustasha unleash fierce racial and religious repression in the territories entrusted to them contributes to the development of the guerrilla.

Much more substantive and formal than those Italians, were the agreements signed by Croatia with Germany, since even the delimitation of the Italian border areas resulted precarious, inaccurate, and certainly not in favor of Italy, probably for a certain discretionary diplomatic superficiality and opportunity in setting national conventions that would certainly have weighed negatively if overly restrictive in future relations between the Italian and Croatian authorities.

The difficult reality to face for the new Croatian state, resided largely in the existing heterogeneous ethnic composition of Yugoslavia and coexisted precariously in which different populations of their language, customs, traditions, religions, many of which have historically always fighting each other : NW Slovenian and Croatian Catholics influenced by the Pan-German civilization, south-west Dalmatian centuries assimilated the policy of Venice and close to Italy in Latin, to the east and Orthodox Christian populations in conflict among themselves as Serbs, Bosnians, Banat populations originated and Vojvodina Hungarians and Romanians strains and again Montenegrins always at war with their neighbors Herzegovina, Sandzak and Albanians, and finally Albanians and Macedonian Muslims contended from Albania and Bulgaria, close to Orthodox Christians in the north and south to Greece. In this colorful sample of humanity they were to add numerous nomadic gypsies from different backgrounds and extraction and strong Jewish minority.

All these populations were burdened by Austrian, Italian, Hungarian, Romanian, Bulgarian and Albanian nationalist mortgages, to which were added strong local nationalist movements of the Croats, Serbs and Montenegrins of various political tendencies: liberal, socialistic, pro fascist, conservative , smallholders, farmers and Catholics fringes a bit anywhere communist-Marxists; Some of these movements sought openly to achieve the separation from Yugoslavia in order to set themselves as autonomous and independent.

All these enzymes were not outside the powerful influence of the clergy, particularly the Catholic Croat, the protection of the Reich that had loyal friends and powerful as the Marshal Kvaternik with a considerable following of the German line sympathizers, Italy's support to Ante Pavelic and his Ustasha nationalist movement. The territorial jurisdiction of Nezavisna Drzava Hrvatska (NDH) co-existed at the time and the geographical subdivision of the new state policy, some 2 million Serbs, 80,000 Jews, 30,000 gypsies, 10,000 Dalmatian and other minorities for about 30,000 people, for a long time, some even for centuries, dwelling pertinent in the circumscription of NDH[467]

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Of these populations centralized interests the Zagreb government finally free to exercise the greatest extent possible its authority, its influence, its power, its will to physically cleanse the territory of N.D.H.

It began from that moment-June 1941-the most ruthless racial persecution among Yugoslav peoples, whose excesses would create natural and logical antecedents of Axis resistance in different regions of the country, and involved Italy and its Armed Forces, in a long, bloody guerrilla war that, lasted from the summer of 1941 to the spring of 1945.

Presided over the Italian zone of Yugoslavia in May 1941, the 2nd Army (Gen. Vittorio Ambrasio) guarding a strip parallel to the current from the north coast (Slovenia) to the south (Albania), an average width of 120-150 km and comprising two distinct zones: the first essentially orbiting under Italian influence, included Slovenia - the town of Brezice and Metlika (entrusted to the XI Army Corps with the Inf. Div. "Granatieri di Sardegna" and "Isonzo").

The coast was assigned to the V Army Corps - from the state border guarded by the XI Army Corps up to Mattuglie, and was guarded by the dependent «Lombardia» and «Re» Army Divisions.

Western Croatia, including Samobor Severin-up to the border of the district of the V Corps., was assigned to the Celere Army Corps (then replaced with the XVIII Army Corps) with the 1st Celere Div. "Eugenio Savoy", 2nd Celere Div. "Emanuele Filiberto Testa di ferro" and 3rd Celere Div. "Prince Amedeo Duke of Aosta"; Dalmatia was instead assigned to the VI Corps with Inf. Div. "Bergamo" and "Sassari" reinforced later by "Taro"; Montenegro, assigned to the competence of the 11th Army of Albania, was manned by the XXII Corps with Inf. Div. "Messina", "Marche", "Torino" while the area of Dibrano-Macedonia was assigned to the XIX Corps with Inf. Div. "Puglia" and "Firenze." A demilitarized zone running parallel to the Italian occupation zone and starting in the north, west of Zagreb and extending south into Macedonia, in the area of Leskovac, geographically divided the Italian and German zones of influence in Yugoslavia and was effectively administered by the N.D.H.

The most important cities policed by the Italian armed forces included: Ljubljana, Novo Mesto, Crikvenica, Delnice, Otacac, Gospic, Karlovac, Bihac, Petrovac, Spalato, Sibenik, Knin, Cetinje, Kukes, Ragusa, Mostar and the main islands of Dalmatia: Segna, Veglia, Arbe, Brazza Lesina, Lissa.

As military commandant and responsible of the affairs and security of the occupying areas of the former Yugoslavia, was appointed the Army Gen. Vittorio Ambrosio, who divided the places occupied entrusting the military commands with civil Commissaries functions for the administration of the areas covered, and what civilian government officials were appointed: Dr. Emilio Grazioli high Commissioner for the province of Ljubljana, Dr. Giuseppe Bastianini as Governor of Dalmatia (later replaced by Dr. Francesco Giunta) and diplomatic adviser Dr. Serafino Mazzolini civilian Commissioner for Montenegro straightforward with special handling. Officials and employees of the former Yugoslav civil and bureaucratic administration were kept in service in the various regional and provincial government offices, together with the formations of the local gendarmerie and the border Customs officers Corps to collaborate to public order and the normal functions of civilian life.

Croatia's accession to the Tripartite Pact in June 1941 brought with it a different legal name for the occupation troops, which formally became: "Forces stationed in independent and allied territory", but this diplomatic formula was not enough for the government of the NDH to insist repeatedly with the Italian government to request the removal of the Italian Armed Forces also from the "buffer" territories entrusted to the control and re-establishment of order by the Italian Armed Forces, similar to what Germany had done for some time, which maintained in Croatia only 6 garrison battalions, a military command, an aeronautical training center, units of the Feld Gendarmerie and the Flihrer Polizei, SS formations and special units of the Sicherheit Dienst (political counter-espionage) and the Geheime Staat Polizei (Gestapo) for the control of the NDH.

However, the persistence of unrest among the local population in the buffer zone, some worrying incidents of disturbance of public order, the presence of dangerous and uncontrolled isolated groups of stragglers from the former Yugoslav army, advised the Italian government not to accede to the requests put forward by the NDH at the moment and to wait for the general situation to stabilize definitively.[468]

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The air units assigned to the 2nd Army in June 1941 included: the 63rd group O.A. with squadrons 41st and 113th of Ro.37 located in Udine - Campoformido and 61st group O.A. with the 34th and 128th squadrons based in Mostar with twin-engine Ca.311. They were the only units of the R.A. available for operations and services.

Which Army Air operating units needed to compete at the request of the Army command in particular danger, the GS/RA had put itself at the disposal on request of the Army GS: a Stormo of bombers - the 39th with groups 39th - 40th located in Tirana with twin-engine BR.20; land based fighters - the two groups 22nd and 150th with MC.200, also based in Tirana; other three groups by O.A. (5th, 70th and 72nd) with six squadrons equipped with Ro.37 respectively located: Scutari (Sqd. 31st and 39th), Coritza (Sqd. 25th and 114th) and 42nd and 120th in Vlore. Overall 165 airplanes including bombers, fighters, reconnaissance planes, potentially available for Yugoslavia.

The existing Yugoslav airfields in the Italian region included: Ljubljana, Marlika, Jastrerbasko, Karlovac, Grobnico, Ogulin, Bihac, Bosanski Petrovac, Zemunik Donji, Nadin, Knin, Glamoc, Livno, Sini, Mostar, Plievlja, Niksic, Beranje, Risan, Cetinje, Pec, Prestina, Lipljan, Tetovo, Gostivar, Kiceva and seaplane of Divulje and Spalato. Other makeshift airfields existed in the occupation zone together with a modest aeronautical organization with basic infrastructure.

The Yugoslav aircraft and war equipment captured in operations in April, was divided among the various agencies and units of the R.A. depending on the characteristics of the captured aircraft and the intended use.

41 Blicher 131 trainers were assigned to flight units of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Air Squadron, the Interceptor Command "Leone", the interceptors unit in Treviso, at 43rd Stormo BT, Schools of Rimini and the 1st CSA of Guidonia.

The SIM twin-engine seaplanes, in number of 7, went to the RM School of Orbetello, Fizir reconnaissance aircraft to the 5th Group OA. and to the Macchi C.200 cinematic assigned to the Russian front, they had been equipped with recovered 35mm AVIA/Burnelli machines for filming dogfights, strafing, escort of bomber-reconnaissance aircraft.

The 39th Sqd. two SM.79 were incorporated into bombing units, two "Fury" biplanes were assigned to the 1st CSA of Guidonia, 5 Dewoitine D.510 went to airports commands of Ravenna, Rimini, Forlì, in sec. flying trainers of the Air Force/Albania. Breguet and Rogožarski were destined to Ravenna, the Hurricane MK.I went to the Sqd. P for propaganda use.

After the end of a war with Greece, Gen. S.A. Ferruccio Ranza was assigned to request to the command of Zone IV Regional Air and of the Aeronautica-Albania command was given to Gen. B.A. Ugo Ferroni.

REPRESSION IN YUGOSLAVIA

As soon as the time necessary to constitute the organizational apparatus and the control of the N.D.H. dissolved quickly, the Ustasci government passed without delay to make fierce, unspeakable and atrocious persecution against ethnic minorities dwelling unfortunately in its territory, following blindly the principles of racial inequality and anticipating Hitler in Yugoslavia in 1941, what would be tragically happened in Eastern Europe by the Nazis in the following years.

Between June-July 1941 were imposed tens of thousands of death sentences, completely destroyed entire communities, razed dozens of villages and population centers, slain with ferocity and sadism were men, women, old people and children belonging to the peoples Orthodox Serbs, Jews, gypsies, in order to clear out without delay and by any means Croatia of the people of other religions, customs, language and tradition.

There were firm and indignant protest from the Italian and German military authorities horrified by what they had seen and tough stances were advanced toward the Poglavnic and Marshal Kvaternik but remained inflexible, supported in this by the political and diplomatic representative of the Zagreb Reich. The Massacres and the destruction in the relevant N.D.H. band continued unabated forcing Italians to start a humanitarian work of salvation of persecuted peoples, who soon put into conflict the military authorities of the 2nd Army with representatives of N.D.H., forcing the Italian Armed Forces to occupy the territory entirely assigned by the Convention of Italy and left temporarily to test the administration of the Croats who had so much undeserved confidence.[469]

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Were killed in a short time about a million Serbs, 50,000 Jews, 25,000 gypsies exterminated most of the Orthodox clergy and entirely the Israelite, but the Italian soldiers also managed to save no less than 600,000 Orthodox Serbs and other ethnic-minority religious, including some thousands of Jews and several hundred Poles who escaped certain death.

Despite the intervention and altruism demonstrated by the commands and Italian soldiers, when the rebellion broke out, there were no distinctions of any kind between Croats, Germans and Italians, as the Yugoslav resistance and particularly the EPLJ, were guilty of horrendous crimes, slaughtering thousands of Italian soldiers in the most heinous ways typically Balkan.

These massacres dilute it deeply orthodox concepts of traditional war and provoked violent reprisals that involved ruthlessly even innocent civilian populations, who paid a heavy price for the occasional lie in areas infested by partisans.

The birth of the Yugoslav resistance to the Pavelic regime and to the Axis, began quietly immediately after the cessation of hostilities in the spring of 1941, and in singular coincidence with the German attack on the USSR, manifested itself more concretely in numerous, small spontaneous movements on military, ethnic, political, religious bases, which gradually assumed increasing dimensions and importance.

Soon the various minor movements were to come together spontaneously and naturally shaped in the most robust and powerful organizations with vehicles and articulated structures of command and peripheral ramifications, until divided over time into three great-strength movements: that of the Serbs headed by General Dragoljub Draza Mihailovic, better known as the Chetnik (patriots) movement of monarchist-nationalist tendencies; in the revolutionary communist movement of the EPLJ (People's Liberation Army Yugoslavia) mainly composed of Croats and Slovenes, and headed by the Marxist Josip Broz Tito said, brought up as a member of the Comintern in the political and terrorist schools of the USSR, sent to the Balkans and credited as politically agent of the Kremlin and Stalin to organize the guerrillas in Yugoslavia, and finally in the insurrectionary movement in said Lika (region of Dalmatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina), built in local defensive function against the persecutions and massacres perpetrated by the Ustasha, this organization then absorbed extent of pouring from the Chetniks and partisans of the EPLJ movements.

Another exception rather deserves the Montenegrin resistance sort after that had been erected in independent kingdom Montenegro, which had been designated the Prince Mihailo Petrovic-Niegos, grandson of Queen Elena of Italy, but he refused to take the throne and to govern Montenegro and by the Italian occupation authorities, however, disliked by the majority of the population was necessary to appoint a committee of government and regency.

The special status of employment in the area presumably influenced by home ties and goodwill of the Queen Elena, favored the emergence of an insurrectional movement which has long harbored by the presence of several officers of the former Yugoslav kingdom and thousands of soldiers freed from Italian to completed transactions. The existence of hidden deposits of long arms and ammunition, facilitated the arming of the Montenegrins, who cunningly seized the political pretext for the feared restoration of the kingdom at odds with their federalist tendencies, to unleash the armed revolt against the Italians who suddenly manifested ferociously and quickly on July 13.

Historically established, that between the end of June and the first half of the month of July 1941, began in Yugoslavia those great insurgency that dragged on with ups and downs and a dripping blood until September 1943 for Italy and continued uninterruptedly until May 1945 for Germany and the now agonizing Nezavisna Drzava Hrvatska of Ante Pavelic.

In these tragic and dramatic events are included the events that saw the Air Force units participating fraternally alongside the infantry, the Alpine troops and the CC.NN. of the Italian Army, in an increasingly massive and organized way in a harsh and difficult, tormented and bloody, multifaceted and articulated war, very different from traditional and conventional wars, to which it was necessary to adapt and improve in order to better adhere to the thousand and one needs of the Army and to make less painful and more acceptable from a human and military duty point of view, the fight that the soldiers of Italy supported marked by great sacrifices, heroism and self-denial, opposed to brutality and indescribable atrocities, reported in the tragic events that historical duty requires to make known.[470]

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CROATIAN NATIONAL AVIATION

Immediately after the Croatian nationalist state constitution arose from the ruins of the monarchical state, it was given considerable impetus by the Ustasha authorities in the preparation of the new Armed Forces placed at the command of the Minister of Defense and Chief of the G.S.G. Marshal Slavko Kvaternik, and among these was formed the new Croatian Air Force based in Zagreb placed under the command of Col. Cencic Pavle with Lt. Col. Vladimir Lorin as Chief of Staff. The Croatian Air Force was divided into 4 zone commands located respectively in Zagreb, Banja Luka, Sarajevo and Brod.

The first group of aircraft taken into care, it represented what was left as a legacy of the Royal Yugoslav Air Force dissolved after the destruction suffered in the war campaign in April 1941, and the division that occurred between Germany, Italy and Hungary. There were Breguet XIX, Ca.310, Do.17 and other aircraft of Yugoslav manufacturing and design: PVT, Rogozarskj, Ikarus, Dod.

These aircraft were intended for Pilot schools with the exception of a number of Do.17K that formed the groups I and IV bombers based at Agram and Banja Luka.

Were established agreements between Croatia, Italy and Germany to provide the necessary technical assistance, education, supply of materials and aircraft to train the new Croatian air force and make it autonomous, efficient and operational in the shortest possible time.

In reality, Germany acquired from the beginning a preponderant participation compared to the Italian one, whose policy was uncertain, cautious, irresolute for political reasons, mental reservations, frictions and resentments of all kinds that made the relations with the Croats difficult even the most modest and elementary ones, surely as a result and cause of the massacres perpetrated. A detachment of the Luftwaffe, 500 men strong, settled in Zagreb to train Yugoslavian pilots and prepare the cadres of the future Croatian air force according to the Luftwaffe model.

In October 1941, the first Croatian bomber squadron was trained in Germany at the Greifswald base, where it received twin-engine Do.17Zs - a more up-to-date version of the famous German bomber - and left immediately after training for the Russian front as part of the IV Group of K.G.3. The other squadrons forming the Bombardment remained between Borongai and Lucko. For the Fighter, the Luftwaffe delivered a certain number of Messerschmitt Bf.109/Es, with which two squadrons were formed, one of which was assigned to the territorial defense of Croatia and the other, numbered as 15th, was assigned to the 52nd JG, operating on the Eastern front, entrusted to volunteer pilots, officially considering that Croatia had not declared war on the Soviet Union until that moment.

By 1943, the squadron had achieved 150 air victories and 2 of its pilots had shot down 37 Soviet aircraft.

To Italy, Croatia demanded military equipment including L.6 tanks, firing centers, A/T guns, Mortars, ammunition, fighter planes and reconnaissance, School training aircraft.

The request was carefully scrutinized by G.S.G that prevaricated long before deciding, considering a number of problems:

1) Croatia fell into the orbit of Italian political influence, a prince of the House of Savoy Aimone of Spoleto had been designated as the King of Croatia with the name of Tomislav II, with these premises Italy then had a moral duty to help and facilitate the new state policy.

2) Croatia was to be considered in all respects as an ally of Italy because of the high state adhering to the Tripartite Pact, and as such it was not possible to disregard the demands of Pavelic. These aspects were opposed:

a) The Ante Pavelic policy and the excesses of the Ustasha movement had seriously disturbed conditions in the Yugoslav territory under the military control of Italian and made difficult coexistence between Italian and Croatian authorities.

b) The defense of the Yugoslav peoples and ethnic minorities by the Italian military authorities, against the abuses and killings perpetrated by the Croats, had significantly altered the relations between Pavelic Croatia and Italy with the establishment of a more political close to Pavelic with regard to Germany.[471]

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c) Finally, the many desertions of entire military units and individuals averse to the Pavelic regime, went to swell the end of resistance, advised a cautious policy in providing weapons and equipment to the Croatian Armed Forces who could one day turn against Italy.

The G.S.G only authorized the sale of tanks L (4 L.33/6 L.35), 10 G.50 fighter including a dual control aircraft, 10 twin-engine Ca.311, 10 Fl.3 trainers and 36 Bucker "Jungman" ex war booty of the former RJ AF.

The G.50 and FL.3 were newly built and were delivered by pilots of the VII Complementary Group C and 53rd Stormo under the command of Capt. Mario Ferrero.

The Ca.311 were transferred by 41st and 122nd O.A. squadrons and the O.A. School of Cerveteri. Also were ceded 7.7 and 12.7 cal. ammunition, bombs of 50 kg, RT stations. RA/350/II Radio direction-finders and P.63/N.

The Italian Air Force was provided to instruct a group of Croatian pilots under the command of Capt. Vladimir Bosner, to provide adequate technical assistance, to continue the tactical field training of Borongai while being prepared and the new airfields of Velika Gorica, Slavonski, Brod, Rajlovac intended for flight schools in the NDH, a school for student pilots was established Italian aviation on the airport of Mostar. It was also agreed a trade for the sale of ex RJAF Alfa 126 engines; in exchange for 6 CR.30/B trainers.

In Croatia, there was some aeronautical design activity at the university level, gliding courses were started among young people to increase aeronautical propaganda, and the construction of a series of gliders was started at the Technical University in Zagreb, including the following models:

24 "Salamandre"
23 “Vrabac”
6 "Komar"
1 "Cavak"

It was begun the construction of a high characteristics glider called PWS 101.

The assistance that the Italian Armed Forces provided to the N.D.H. was certainly inferior to that which the Germans gave on a larger scale and with greater generosity of means, but as previously mentioned there were valid reasons for limiting military assistance to the Croczia to the indispensable minimum, whose policy and the methods it pursued were repugnant to the conscience of the authorities and of the Italian soldiers sent to garrison Yugoslavia.

However, on some occasions and contingent needs, it was necessary to implement the military cooperation measures when the partisans of the EPLJ attacked and slew mercilessly small remote isolated garrisons in the mountains and forests of Croatia and Slovenia, Montenegro and Bosnia, Sandjak and in Herzegovina.

The size and proportions of the insurrectional movement were a Yugoslav, wake-up call for the Axis and Italy and Germany were forced to strengthen the garrisons of the occupied areas and to allocate air forces in an ever-increasing needs of counterinsurgency operations. Initially and in singular form, there were numerous examples of distinction and spontaneous collaboration between insurgents and Italian military commands, almost always in the anti Croatian function, meaning that the insurrection of certain Serb population was derived from the need to react to survive the persecution of the Croats of NDH, and settled a *modus vivendi** with severe disappointment and resentment on the part of the Pavelic authorities, whose excesses, it should be clearly stated, had originated the revolt.

Far more serious and worrying instead was the revolt unleashed in Serbia against the Germans by General Mihailovic, whose units had conquered a large extent of the territory occupied by the Reich. The communist partisan movement of Tito began instead to operate on a reduced and discontinuous form in attempt to consolidate cadres and organization, and only after the German attack on the USSR and precise instructions of Moscow, established secretly under the code "Gia Gia” used by the Comintern for secret communications with Tito, controlled by the Soviet Lebedev, the Kremlin's man of confidence, manifested a more lively guerrilla activities. The political-military movement of the communist Josip Broz, known more commonly by the Nome de guerra *of Tito in Yugoslavia enjoyed the support of Moscow political and economic implemented for some time through the Comintern, which made secret use of the Soviet Embassy Counsellor in Belgrade Lebedev, for relations with the Yugoslav communists and particularly with Vojislav Gavrilovic, a prominent advocate of the P.C.J. Educated in the USSR policy sole, a friend of Stalin and his Personal Representative in Yugoslavia, Tito made use of the widespread organizational apparatus of the Yugoslav Communist Party, which could number in the summer of 1941 of about 12,000 regular members, 14,800 young communists and 200,000 (Druze) potential sympathizers.*[472]

*Latin = way of life or mode of living.

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With a select group of activists representing many regions of Yugoslavia, Tito formed the EPLJ (Yugoslav People's Army of Liberation) and settled in the Uzice area a little further away from the Ravna Gora of Mihailovic, with which he tried to establish contacts for an action in common.

Then there was the ethnic nationalist movement of the Montenegrin General Giukanovic that conformed to the identical aim of Colonel Mihailovic, and coexisted alongside the armed forces set up by the Communist Party of Montenegro headed by Milovan Djilas and Arso Jovanovic who were inspired, albeit autonomously, to by the EPLJ political prospects of Tito.

Total employment of the demilitarized by the end of the armed forces Italian reinforced in the meantime by Inf. Div. "Cacciatori delle Alpi" and alpine and Bersaglièri regiments, He established in Lika a period of peaceful coexistence of Italian soldiers with the Serbs, who contributed militarily to eliminate communist formations located in the area by the EPLJ, in exchange for Italian protection of Croats units of the NDH

The birth of the Yugoslavs insurrectionary movements was immediately exploited by England and the Soviet Union, which for different reasons, they sent their agents to establish liaison sections and to facilitate in every way the development and strengthening of the resistance by sending weapons, equipment, special materials and give political and military address common to the various movements against the axis.

Latent until the first half of June and turned into military apparatus at the end of July, the resistance movement by Tito suddenly became active and important after the German attack on Russia, when the Comintern issued to all the Communist parties of Europe their order to attack Nazism with all the means and weapons available, providing them with funds, weapons, materials and precise information about how to start and continue the guerrilla war against the Germans. However, it was the last movement to move militarily among all of Yugoslav resistance movements.

The Russians were not the only ones to take advantage of the European resistance movement, since even England, which have long operated actively in the underground movements in Europe, it wanted to fit in the Yugoslav events, raising hopes, encouraging the organization, providing materials, weapons, equipment, first at only Chetnik movement of Draza Mihailovic and later to the EPLJ of Josip Broz, who had meanwhile taken the *Nome de guerra* of Tito in the hope, then was disappointed, to ingratiate the sympathy and acclaim by dragging it from the Western democracies, of which the Yugoslav dictator shrewdly exploited the aid of all kinds artfully fueling hopes.

To achieve these assumptions, the British War Office made use of the S.O.E. (Special Operations Executive) organization, a special Corp set up to facilitate, assist and refill with addresses, tips, methods, men, weapons, materials and equipment resistance in Europe. The SOE, construed in July 1940 under the direction of Mr. Hugh Dalton, was articulated in the Office Propaganda (SO.1) and Sabotage (SO.2), in the various operating sections: French, Belgian, Dutch, Norwegian, etc., whose members were trained in Weedon Schools, Loch, Ailort, Wanborough, Arisaig, where they received comprehensive training, thorough, detailed on the tasks to be performed, of habits, common materials and specialists to use in action, on radio instructions, equipment explosives, weapons.

He followed a familiarization course, a pre-launch training with parachute at Massey House in Cheshire and specialization in Manchester Ringway, a martial and sabotage to Hatfield and radio broadcasts in Bedford, and finally the chosen agents was finishing the course with an specialization internship in Beaulieu (New Forest), where they learned to use the codes and the last instructions before starting the mission.

The agents of S.O.E. were transported in the countries where they operated with fast boats, submarines and airplanes of the "Moon Squadrons" under the command of Maj. A. Rose, so named because they are intended to work at night and with the presence of the moon (Sqdns. 138th/161st) equipped with "Hampden" and "Wellington" aircraft and the 1419th Sqdn. with "Lysander" for short-range missions.[473]

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The difficulties of bringing SOE military missions and agents to Yugoslavia by parachuting, difficulties inherent in the distance to be covered compared to the autonomy of the aircraft available at the time, convinced the SOE leaders, sensitized by members of the Yugoslav government in exile in London, to send a first exploratory mission by sea under the command of Captain Bill Hudson accompanied by two Yugoslav officers, who landed on the Montenegrin coast transported by the submarine "Triomphe" and reached, with the help of Jovanovic's communist partisans, Draza Mihailovic's refuge in Ravna Gora, establishing agreements and collaboration for the future conduct of the guerrilla warfare. The development of the guerrilla and the measures taken by the Army also influenced the R.A. which adopted some preliminary precautions, initially reinforcing the units of O.A. - the unique air force present in Yugoslavia - also moving to seaplane base of Tivat (Kotor) a section of 4 Cant.501 in anti-submarine function detached from the 142nd Sqd. R.M., to prevent as far as possible, the activity of enemy submarines in the Adriatic mainly used for the transport of informers and saboteurs. The departure to Russia of the 61st Group OA and replacement of the unit, was partially resolved with the transfer to Mostar of the 36th Sqd. (Capt. F. Greco) with 7 Ca.311, whereas the 2nd Army had at its disposal the other OA groups, 63rd (Sqd. 41st/113th) in Udinej Campoformido and 71st (Sqd. 38th/116th) based in Gorizia/Merna, both equipped with twin-engine Ca.311. In October, a section of the 38th Sqd. OA was stationed in Mostar to temporarily strengthen the 36th, considering the huge task he had to bear for months the only available squadron of tactical and logistical support for the VI Corps.

In November, the 5th O.A. of Group Scutari took charge of the 36th Sqd., always based in Mostar, which together with the 39th stationed in Shkodra completed the organic entity of the unit, now reconstituted. This was therefore the situation existing in Yugoslavia at the time when the uprising began.

British agents of S.O.E. (Special Operations Executive) had been parachuted into Ravna Gora - the mountain range of Mihailovic western Serbia stronghold -and Captain Hudson had reached first the leader of the Chetniks along with two senior officers of the former Royal Yugoslav Army, as mediators and it granted the Yugoslav government in exile of King Pietro II.

In October of 1941 there was also a meeting between Tito and Mihailovic to agree a joint action against the Axis, the Croats and the Serbs of Pavelic Nedic, but other than general statements of principle from the talks produced no positive effects felt and effective collaboration between the two main movements of the Yugoslav resistance, which later resulted in open armed clashes between Chetniks and communist partisans, while German troops - were launching a violent offensive that forced the partisans to take refuge in safer areas. Maj. Hudson abandoned Mihailovic and Tito reached the command that is found to be well supported by the USSR even now from England. The Draza Mihailovic formations were dissolved and men infiltrated the local gendarmerie or sent home for the upcoming winter season; the brigades of the EPLJ remained instead under arms in inaccessible mountainous reliefs of Sandzak, where with great hardship and heavy losses surpassed the winter 1941-42. The guerrilla warfare gradually spread throughout Yugoslavia, involving Germans, Italians, Croats, Serbian nationalists, loyalist Domobrani, Chetniks, communist partisans and a large part of the civilian population who suffered greatly from the effects and destruction of the war.

Germany was now present in Yugoslavia with 5 Inf. Div. (118th, 342nd, 369th, 718th and 1st Mountain), a Brigade of the 1st SS Div. Prinz Eugen, a Gebirgejager Brigade (mountain troops), the Special sabotage Regiment "Brandemburg" and also a force of 6 Battalions in independent Croatia, a school for student pilots and specialists in Zagreb, batteries of Flak on the Dalmatian coastline and in the major cities. Bombers - reconnaissance units were in Belgrade, Skopje and Zagreb.

Hungary had an Inf. Div. in Banat and Bulgaria an Inf. Div. in Macedonia.

The air forces of the Tripartite Nations who gravitated to the Yugoslavia borders included:

Bulgaria: 7 Air Regt. with 4 fighter groups, 2 bomber, 5 Recon/tactical support, training with two groups of six squadrons, an official pilot school, a non-commissioned officers and one for specialists, 1 school photographers, 1 school Regiment and 3 training squadrons and also four A/A artillery groups with batteries 20 to 88 mm. and 12 to 20 mm.[474]

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A total of 430 airplanes divided into 50 bombers, 80 fighters, 120 reconnaissance aircraft, 180 Trainers located in Bojuriste, Plovdiv, Jambal, Gorna Orebovo, Karlovo, Vrajedenna, Telise and Kazaulik.

Romania: 6 Flotillas and a Group of Bomber and Fighters thus placed: 1st Flotilla of Bombers in Brasov, the 2nd in Tecnei, 3rd in Craiova; 1st Fighter Flotilla in Pipera and 3rd in Galati, 3rd strategic reconnaissance Flotilla at Zilisteana. LARES Transport Group in Bucharest, Flight School in Zilisteana, Aviation Education Center in Bucharest.

A share of the Fighters, Bombers and Reconnaissance aircraft was in Russia with the Romanian expeditionary force.

The Romanian air force included about 600 airplanes divided between *Fighters* PZL.11, IAR.80, Bf.109, He.112. *Bombers* SM.79/B, He.111, Potez 63, PZL.37, Do.17. *Scouts* IAR.37/38/39, Cant.501.

Hungary: the aviation mostly deployed at home with 4 squadrons CR.42, 2 CR.32, 2 Re.2000, 7 Ju.86, 2 of Ca.135, 2 of He.70 for a total of about 200 planes, except obviously this share in Russia.

The Croatian Air Force reorganized by the Luftwaffe consisted of units with reconnaissance biplanes Breguet XIX, Fizir and Ca.310/311 formerly belonging to the Royal Yugoslav Air Force.

Then there were some aircraft Do.17 bombing and Bf.109 fighters and other heterogeneous trainer/connection aircraft.

THE UPRISING IN MONTENEGRO

On July 13, 1941 the revolt, organized and directed by the ethnic nationalist movement, suddenly flared throughout Montenegro originated and unmotivated by contradictory reports, many of which are inaccurate and provocative circulated of art from numerous sources generally hostile to Italy.

Montenegro was garrison by the "Messina" Inf. Div. (Gen. C. Tucci) and minor units scattered in numerous small detachments in the bitter and difficult territory, badly served and connected by roads and railways, and it was on these tiny garrisons set up in the wrong general conception of the capillary control territory, which unleashed the fierce attacks of the Chetniks.

The garrisons of Misici, Buljarica, Korita, Rezovici, Virpazar, Petrovac, where the Financial Guards and Carabinieri were on duty, were destroyed to the last man with bestial ferocity and resulted in around a hundred deaths on the first day of the revolt. Also attacked the garrisons of Milocer, defended by a Co. of foot soldiers of the 94th Inf. Regiment, released two days later by soldiers and sailors. A motorized column was attacked in the Obzovica area which had 43 deaths and numerous injuries. On days 14 to 15 July were destroyed garrisons of Bogetici, Bioce, Spuz, Cevo with the death of all Italian military; were destroyed bridges, telegraph and telephone lines, assaulted insulated vehicles, all soldiers found in the insurgency areas were killed.

Other sporadic attacks were reported from all over the territory of Montenegro and numerous rescue invocations could not be answered for road interruptions and difficulties, everywhere face the danger. The entire Italian military had been caught by surprise. Once again it was the air force to move to ascertain the real situation. Orders for the 5th Group O.A. (Maj. Sisto):

a) in the morning on July 16 will perform reconnaissance on the territory included in the ring Bar-Budva-Cettigne- Virpazar-Antivari. Reconnaissance of rebel positions east of Rjeka. Reconnaissance on roadway of Niksic.

b) machine gun and bomb rebels units still and in motion on the indicated roadway in item a), if it is possible to identify them with certainty.

Signed: Gen. Mentasti (XIV Army Corp.)

As they began the first large-insurgency operations in Yugoslavia, the Aerial Observation which it erroneously classified as a branch of the Air Force Auxiliary, took his revenge and lived leading its great moment, committing to the last breath with its modest units, with poor equipment of airplanes, with inadequate operating structures and taking as a commitment, achievements and sacrifices, up to the most prestigious Air Force specialties.

By merit of his men and daily operating in a difficult theater of war, treacherous, perilous and geographically hostile as that of the Balkans, held in front for over a year to always need more requests from countless Army commands, anxious to solve the dramatic situation, fighting alone until the moment in which the gravity of the situation obliged the upper commands the creation to deal on more consistent basis and multiform the rampant phenomenon of guerrilla warfare.[475]

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But in 1941 the brunt of operations fell exclusively on the full responsibility for the Royal Army Aviation.

While the Italian military and civilian authorities were trying to put a little order in the intricate tangle ethnic - religious Yugoslavia, representatives of the Zagreb government continued their work of persecution of non-Croatian breed populations.

Partisan reprisals not long in coming, and there were no distinction between Croatian, Italian, German since all were attacked and massacred if overwhelmed.

The 5th Group O.A. began operating in Montenegro since July 20, trying as much as possible to bring aid to small garrisons of Italian soldiers encircled and isolated. In the following days continued the extermination of the small Italian garrisons in Lijeva, Sahovici, Ljubnice, Murini, composed largely of financiers and carabinieri.

It was necessary to completely revise the policy adopted hitherto by the Italian authorities, to control the sudden danger to which, it is worth pointing out, the Italian commands were not at all prepared for mentality, employment doctrines, military psychology to the guerrillas, territorial organization set, vehicles, weapons, equipment available.

The overall situation became extremely worrying when a sturdy column with tanks was attacked in the vicinity of Budva and repulsed to Cetinje with heavy losses on July 18, and when fell to siege the strong garrison of Danilovgrad a Battalion reinforced by a antitank Co, lost 20 July together with the garrison of Berane also consists of a Battalion of the 93rd Inf. Regiment; followed the subsequent destruction of the garrisons of Bijelo Polje, Zabliak, Trsa, Kolagiu, Savnik.

The Military Governor of Montenegro Gen. of the Army Corp. Alessandro Pirzio Bfroli, adopted a number of measures to prevent the spread of the insurgency, restore order, confiscating arms, re-establish communications, proceed to all those military actions necessary to eliminate the rebellion.

The gravity of the situation that had so suddenly created was required, necessarily and urgently the aviation assistance to ascertain, check, provide assistance and support in the territory concerned.

Nr. 3955/Op.

Breakdowns tasks for aircraft of the 5th Group O.A. in conjunction with actions of the Divisions "Messina", "Venezia", "Cacciatori delle Alpi", "Puglia", "Taro," "Pusteria".

Preparation and protection of Gruda airport (by "Taro" Inf. Div.).

Assigning targets for light and heavy bombardment should be addressed, the XIX Corps Command in time specifying the time and day of the mission. To cope with the uprising in Montenegro were put into action: 5th Group O.A. (Sqd. 31st/39th) of Scutari, the 70th (Sqd. 25th/114th) of Koritza, the 72nd (Sqd. 42nd/120th) of Vlora, 630 (Sqd. 41st/113th) of Udine employees for use by the 2nd and 11th Armies with 38 Ro.37 Bis and 21 Ca.311, while the Air Force/Albania competed with 38th Stormo BT of Tirana (39th/40th Groups), the 150th Fighter Group (Sqd. 363rd/364th/365th) distance in Albania available also based in Tirana; 59 scouts participated in the anti-guerrilla cycle reinforced with 28 BR.20 and 39 MC.200. Altogether the SMA was offering the Command of the 2nd Army in Yugoslavia and the 11th of Albania, about 120 airplanes to face the situation that the Army G.S. rightly concerned about the consequences and developments' that he could assume, thought to stem, sending new G.U. including the Inf. Divs. "Venezia", "Cacciatori delle Alpi" and the Alp. Div. "Pusteria".

The departure for Russia of the 61st Group OA and the 22nd Group CT as already mentioned, only entailed the replacement of the first unit with the 71st Group O.A. (Lt. Col. Antonio Prato) with 38th and 116th Sqd.

The beginning of the first large-scale roundups cycle involved the participation of the OA units first and after the fighters and bombers, which, starting from July 20, collaborated effectively in the area of Barane-Kolasin-Andrijevica with bombing/strafing and supplies to isolated garrisons, which were air drop food, ammunition, medicines and other necessary material. It was established the criteria for use and aerial cooperation, i.e. in the operation of Virpazar.[476]

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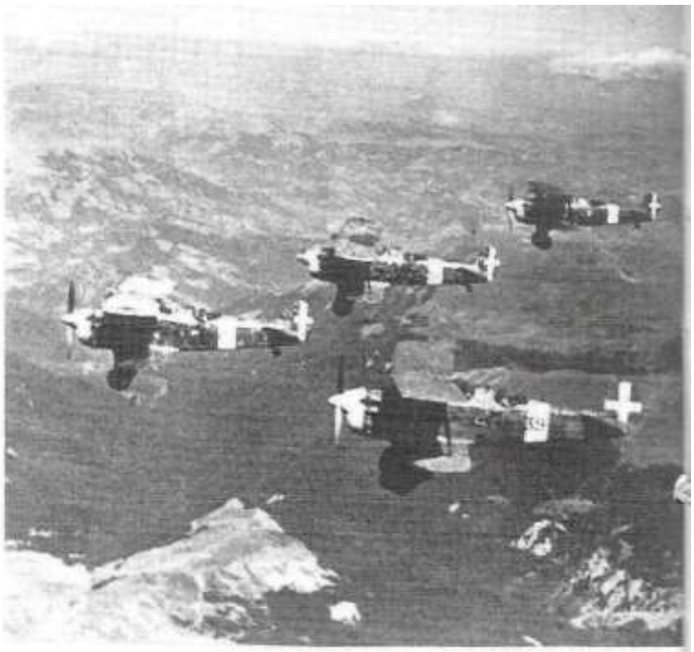


Ro 37 the 39th Sqd OA participate in counterinsurgency operations in Montenegro after the uprising of July 1941. Within days, the guerrillas killed hundreds of Italian garrison troops to the region.

Nr. 3443/OP

Aviation compete action of Virpazar in support column 11th Alpine Regiment from Rjeka for Virpazar and will control area use Battalion "Pieve di Cadore" from Antivari of Sotomici. Keep also in check Vignienieci-Cisto Pelje area. Aircraft Commander 5th Group O.A. details to take action by the command XIV Corps.

In the third decade of July and August, other counterinsurgency operations took place in the areas of Podgorica-Niksic-Savnik and concurred in this cycle also the 71st Group OA who had a squadron in Gorizia and one in Mostar, this squadron that began to operate on August 3 bombing and strafing rebel formations in the Dvar area.

Other raids took place in the area of Sahovici-Bijelo Polje-and-Plievlja in the Tara valley that appeared occupied and then vacated by rebel elements driven with valid aviation assistance of bombers and reconnaissance.

On August 20, the police cycle and restore order in Montenegro could be said to be concluded with the apparent and regained control of the entire territory.

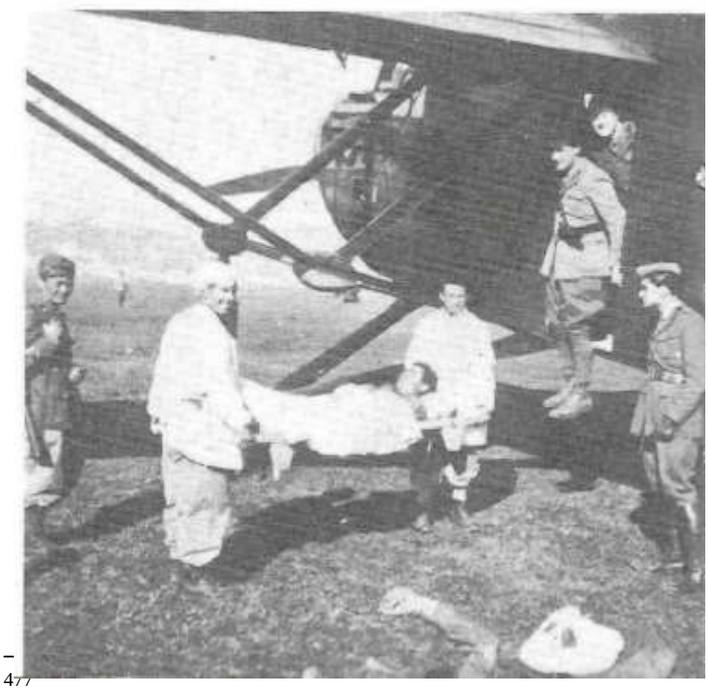
Live eulogies were made by the Armed Forces High Command of Albania to Army divisions, Navy and Air Force who had contributed to the restoration of legality.

The Italian losses were 1,079 killed and wounded, those of the Chetniks - Montenegrins more than 5,000 dead and 7,000 wounded.

They distinguished themselves in the "Montenegro" operational cycle the O.A. Groups 72nd (Maj. Nicola Nicolai) and the 70th (Maj. Francesco Casarosa) as well as the 36th Sqd. (Capt. Filippo Greco) who had done a commendable service getting more praise and commendations shooting, by the command of the "Marche" Inf. Div. (Gen. Amico), the VI Army Corps (Gen. Dalmazzo) and Superalba (Gen. Pirzio Biroli).

Among the tactical reasons that caused the dispersion of Montenegrin nationalist movement, were to report the implementation of traditional control methods, since the formation of the rebels were composed largely of former soldiers freed by Italian and organized by regular officers Royal Yugoslav army -a method, since it is ill-suited to guerrilla warfare as would be conducted instead some time later, and with unorthodox methods by the EPLJ of Tito.

The Italians wounded escaped the massacres of the partisans are evacuated with airplanes. A Ca. 111 of 36th Sqd (Capt. Filippo Greco) on the small field of Pecko in the area manned by the VI Army Corp.



Fair and peaceful cooperation agreements were established between the Italian military authorities and the Montenegrins nationalistic leaders, these exacerbated by the fact that during the communist rebellion formations of Pijade, Markovic, Jovanovic had took advantage of the situation to exterminate their political opponents,[477]

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and after the end of Chetnik guerrillas had attacked by ambush Italian columns in an area controlled entirely by the Chetniks, by tricking Italian commands that the authors of the massacre were the Montenegrin nationalists, with the result that Italian command fell into the ambiguity and ordered retaliatory action against local populations between Podgorica-Kolasin, unjustly and arbitrarily occupied by Tito partisans. It was necessary to re-arm with the tasks of self-defense the Chetniks groups set at the head of their villages that over time, with the help of Italian, they managed to drive out the Titina from Montenegro.

THE SLOVENIA-DALMATIA AIR FORCE, (SLO.DA.)

There has been talk of the action took place in Montenegro from Albania air units, but the first steps of the Aviation of Herzegovina and Dalmatian in support of the 2nd Army troops, had taken place already in June 1941 with exploration flights, reconnaissance, bombing and strafing by the 61st Group OA based in Mostar, which operated in the area of Novesinje-Zolen Gora in support of the "Marche" Inf. Div..

In September they were recorded other interventions at the request of VI Corps interested to perform an operation in the area of Drvar in Bosnia, which had gathered relevant groups of the EPLJ amounting to more than 2,500 well-armed men. They were attended by units of the "Sassari", the 6th Bersaglieri Regiment, 7th CC.NN. Battalion and services in partnership with German and Croatian units in charge of outreach activities. This also included the flanking action of the "Bergamo" Inf. Div.

The operation began on September 7 with the support of the 71st Group O.A. of Mostar who had replaced the 61st transferred to Russia following the C.S.I.R.

The 36th Sqd. O.A. was transferred from Mostar to Peci a small airfield to better cope with the tactical situation with more immediate and frequent interventions between observation, links and bombing. The detached aviation competition on the Peci airfield (TL-OF positions) consisted in performing the following tasks:

1) Observation in the Palez area (TN-EK), on the hill 1,142 (TL-EM), on mule tracks to the north and south of the Metla (TI-EO) vigilant on the roads to Drvar to hill 1,142 and Drvar to Ostreli, connection to the Rore area.

2) bombing of objectives of hill 1,142 and Palez and from the ground with reports of an cloth orders. On September 25, the entire operation could be closed down with the destruction of the local factory of firearms by the partisans before fleeing to the mountains of Gorna Ribnik.

On October 5, began "Operation Z" with the participation of the Army Corps V and VI with Inf. Divs. "Re," "Lombardia" and the 2nd Celere, "Sassari", "Marche", "Bergamo", " Cacciatori delle Alpi."

The purpose of the large mopping-up operation was to complete the occupation of the demilitarized zone, strengthening the garrisons and the most important military location, close the possible retreat to mountain refuges by the Yugoslav formations, pressed to the east by the German and Croatian units moving from Serbia and from eastern Bosnia and greatly reduce the area in which the EPLJ bands could move and operate.

The reconnaissance aircraft leaned flights of observation and links the movements of the Army units and intervened in the clashes which occurred in the town of Miholisko, Koinjz, DeBella, Kosa, Debeli, Presina, Bihac.

On September 30, during a mission in the mountains of Herzegovina fell Lt. Col. Proto commander of the 71st Group OA whose name was added to those of the fallen airmen to start from May in Yugoslavia.

In late October, the operation could be considered concluded with the dispersion of the bands, the roundup of weapons, the pacification of entire areas before turbulent.

Was held by the Italian military authorities also have a conference with representatives of the rebels from Herzegovina and settled agreements to end the guerrillas in areas under the control of Italy.

Clashes with the partisans also occurred in Croatia and later still in Montenegro, where arrived reinforcing the "Puster" Alpine Div., but mostly the situation was re-established with the creation of garrisons and checkpoints.[478]

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The territorial organization created in the Italian occupation zone had been divided into 3 distinct zones: a) land annexed to Italy; b) demilitarized zone; c) buffer zone between the territory of the Italian jurisdiction and German control area. This division had extremely heterogeneous conditions for serious difficulties orographic, climatic, environmental, streets and road and rail communications, alternating flat areas to other mountain, high rocky, wooded floors, deep valleys, numerous rivers. Mountain ranges of a certain size were in Croatia, Slovenia, Dalmatia and Montenegro. The streets were normally at irregular bottom, twisty, narrow and poorly paved and transformed themselves in the winter in muddy conditions while snowfall blocking communication through the most important higher passes from 2,000 to 2,700 m; major railways went from Trieste to Ljubljana - Zagreb - Belgrade; from Rijeka to Karlovac - Ogulin - Gospic - Sibenik - Spalato - Sarajevo - Belgrade and then to Nis - Skoplje enters Bulgaria and Greece.

With this extremely complicated picture fractionation by the Italian forces in small garrisons scattered over thousands of square kilometers of mountainous terrain and difficult practicability, was undoubtedly a serious error of assessment and defensive setting that was harshly paid by the Italian Armed Forces with a continuous and incessant trickle of human lives, which made the Balkan front the war sector which was the highest toll in dead, wounded and missing compared to all the other theaters of war.

The concept of the principle of extending anywhere on occupied territory, the presence and the Italian authorities and has entrusted to small and sparse garrisons consisting of CC.RR. or R. Finance Guards, platoons of infantry or CC.NN. soon proved completely wrong because prestige and authority, oversight and strength were quickly canceled when substantial partisan bands presented themselves in the localities monitored widely and imposed by force of numbers and arms, surrender or destruction, literally exterminating - in one or the other hypothesis - a few dozen Italian troops engaged in the operation of their duty, cracking badly in the eyes of the people the power and authority of the Italian Armed Forces, exhibiting as trophies the unfortunate soldiers captured before slaughter them in the tradition of the atavistic Balkan savagery. In this absurd way were eliminated one after the other systematically, dozens and dozens of small places guarded by a few soldiers in remote locations of Yugoslavia and when there came the harsh and long Balkan winter the garrisons were also isolated by the snow, the road blocks, the destruction wrought by the partisans and it was not possible to bring them for a long time, any rescue aid to the desperate cries that came to the commands.

Only extreme possibility remained that dramatic juncture was the air supply accomplished with the available aircraft, and once again the air force was called to perform a thankless task, difficult, no doubt superior to its real possibilities.

The first emergency intervention appeared in December in Croatia, when partisan attacked and isolated the garrison of Korenica on Gospic-Priboj road guarded by a detachment of the "Re" Inf. Div. and only in the spring it was possible to unlock it after suffering heavy casualties among the attackers, and the unit that had to free him, succeeded in after three failed attempts to overcome the partisan resistance. With the garrison of Korenica remained besieged even those of Udbina, Primislje, Slunj and Donje Lapac and their survival was made possible only with the intervention of the planes that re-supplied them to drop more than food, ammunition, medicines, materials.

It appeared quite clear that air from a few O.A. submitted in support of the 2nd Army were totally inadequate and unfit to perform duties so multifarious and unexpected and GS/RA on probing G.S.G the necessarily had to prepare a large air force which changed its name to Air Force Command Slo.Da. (Slovenia-Dalmatian).

There were up to December 1941, isolated attacks brought, by partisans, Communists organizational units including those in Pobori, Mateševo, Plievlja, Grahovac with Italian military killings and prisoners massacred in a brutal fashion.

In all these operations did not fail once again the aviation assistance, completed with bombing missions, machine-gunning, strafing, air supply and evacuation of the seriously injured.

The partisan uprising in Yugoslavia forced even the OKW to reinforce the contingent of occupation troops to deal with the situation and the safety device, has proved inadequate for the development of the guerrillas and were initiated great cycles of operations against the rebels.[479]

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From September 20 to December 4, there was the first major operation coordinated counterinsurgency between Italian, German and Croatian units in eastern Bosnia and that cost heavy losses to EPLJ formations.

The increased importance of guerrilla warfare in the Balkans, as was finding the assignment to the German commander of the Southeast Field Marshal von List, the responsibility to restore security and to suppress the insurgency movement in the field, prior agreements with the Italian, Croatian, Bulgarian and Hungarian military authorities. The command of the Luftwaffe of Southeast Europe was also in charge of supporting the operations by allocating adequate air forces available to the Southeast Command, with the commitment to coordinate missions with the existing air force commands allies in the area.

THE SERBIAN REBELLION IN CROATIA

It has been said of the onslaught of Croats against Serbs and Jews and what did the Italian authorities to crack down on such acts of ferocity, even within the limits of the territorial jurisdictions and non-interference in the internal affairs of the new Croatian state of Pavelic.

These massacres could not long remain unpunished, because the ancient hatred between the two communities would one day again unleashed, when the Serbs, after the first moment of bewilderment in the fluidity of the new situation, they would have reacted and their way, with the usual anger and typically Balkan vengeance.

On August 1st, Serbian Chetniks suddenly attacked almost everywhere the Croatian garrisons of Lika - a region inhabited mainly by Serbs in the north-east of Dalmatia and between Bosnia and Herzegovina - destroying and massacring completely the garrisons of Ervenik, Zegar, Gospic, Srb, Velika, Zrmanje, Kmin.

This bloody and fierce uprising was not directed this time against the Italians, though present in the area but was raging exclusively on Croatian - military and civilian - on the Zagreb government authorities and institutions, which in the most dramatic occasions and hopeless - asked and obtained the help of our troops to locally resolve serious situations of physical survival.

But the Italian commanders had also and above all interest in not antagonizing the Serbs, and used in relations with the Croats the utmost circumspection, limiting cooperation to the formal aspects of the alliance, rejecting any military operations in support of Croats against the Chetniks after these they had suffered heavy defeats in the raids.

To avoid further complications and attempt to pacify Lika the Army GS ordered the command of the 2nd Army to occupy the whole demilitarized band by the end of August, restoring quickly the order and relative peace in the area and combating excesses on the one hand and on the other.

In the region of Lika there was still hostile in the month of September 1941, only the EPLJ communist movement of Tito concentrated in the Drvar area, which in the same month "formally declared war on Italy."

It was therefore necessary to clean up the area of EPLJ formations, with a German-Italian-Croatian combined operation began on September 7 especially with the aviation assistance, which is located with squadrons of Ca.311/Ro.37 on advanced airfield Peci for strafing actions - bombing and reconnaissance, are finished on 25 with the conquest of Drvar and the destruction of most of the Datisi units fleeing to the Dinaric mountains.

The tasks assigned to aviation included: a) Monitor the affected area on Palez (TN-EK sectors) on the saddle hill 1142 (TL- EM sector) on mule tracks to N. and S. of Metla River (TI-ED Sector) , on access roads to Drvar to Dstrelj (TR-FG sector) as well as the connection with the "Bergamo" column in the Rore area.

b) Bombing later on specified objectives and particularly of hill 1142 and Palez to be executed no later than 09:00.

Reports from the ground with signal towels.

Despite these military setbacks and heavy losses, the political emissaries of the EPLJ had good play in fanning the flames of Serbian-Croatian nationalistic resentment, managing to catalyze consensus and support to Tito's movement by the victims of the civil war, enticed and allured by the prospect of a large new Yugoslavia that held the right account interests of racial, ethnic, religious and traditional of all the people that made it up.[480]

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As a first goal to be achieved, the political direction of the EPLJ placed in the foreground the struggle against fascism, identified the “straightforward” in Italian, German, Croatian and nationalist Chetniks present in Yugoslavia and operating against the EPLJ communists.

From October to December the Italian troops consolidating the occupation of the demilitarized zone, setting up garrisons in the most important locations, eliminating the formations of rebels placed in the affected areas, pacifying the region, confiscating arms and related material and coming into direct contact with the German line of demarcation. There was a period of relative calm in the entire occupied zone, but in December 1941 there was an awakening of the partisan war by the EPLJ, that despite having suffered heavy defeats had reorganized with the help of London and Moscow, had constituted new formations and retrieved numerous Croatian origin military equipment, Italian, German, Soviet and British and taking advantage of the harsh winters, which had isolated with snow principals and Italian garrisons, attacked with overwhelming force the Italian units were systematically annihilating or isolating them with the encirclement as was the garrison of Korenica was stuck by Tito for more than 3 months.

In that dramatic period, the only possibility of connection between the headquarters and the garrison was held in addition to the tenuous strands of the radio especially with the concrete aviation presence.

They were supplied with aircraft garrisons of Korenica and Slunj Primislje remained isolated for several months during which the men received from the aviation everything needed to survive until the time of their release took place in early spring 1942.

The need to connect the various isolated garrisons, often without radio equipment (a real tragedy was the lack of connections with transceiver equipment with which it would have been possible to save many Italian soldiers) forced the few reconnaissance aircraft scattered over the vast and difficult mountainous territory of Yugoslavia to do everything possible to re-establish contact, give maximum assistance to the soldiers, and keep the command informed of the situation. The pilots and specialists performed authentic professional and daring miracles, flying over the mountains, in the narrow valleys between clouds and ice.

On December 6, a Ca.111 of the 36th Sqd. piloted by Capt. Filippo Greco instructed to deliver a package to the garrison of Niksic (Montenegro) landed in a clearing near the village controlled by rebels and it was only with the intervention of a column promptly sortie from the village with tanks and automatic guns, to remove the brave pilot from a dangerous situation. Loading the plane with urgent material Capt. Greco subsequently arranged to supply the besieged garrison of Bileca and repeated the landing action on the Niksic airfield to perform a new and important supply mission.

On December 15, there was a new action in the Blagai Kupres area, no longer to airdrop supplies but to break up and machine-gun at low altitude groups of rebels who had surrounded the garrison, while the plane came under heavy rifle and automatic weapons fire.

December 18 was made a new airdrop mission of the garrisons of Plana and Bileca, throwing the materials for the benefit of the soldiers left without medicines, mission carried out in difficult weather conditions, rain, poor visibility and serious danger to the pilot trying to overcome after three failed attempts, a mountain pass and finally to penetrate in the valley where they were was located the Trebisnaca garrison, flying at low altitude mountain peaks motioned violent enemy fire that struck the plane in several places. The tenacity of the pilot had won every adversity! It was particularly intense in that dramatic period of the aviation supply isolated garrisons and encircled and proved very valuable air suppliers model Bands 40/41 type, widely used for food, medicine, materials of all kinds. These devices designed by Col. Pilot Giovanni Bordini, allowed to launch weights up to 60 kg with parachute cloth from 12 square meters that opened gradually in three stages allowing the steady descent of the material without tearing and stress. Each SM.81 type aircraft could charge 45 to 60 air suppliers (2,700 kg/13,900) and to a lesser extent other employed aircraft (Ca.111, Ca.133).

The food supplies (flour, wheat, legumes) and clothing were air dropped using a simple and effective system consisting of filling the package-envelope half or three-fifths of its capacity with the materials or supplies from the supply, using a second or third bag as supplementary and safety wrapping.[481]

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Personnel: dead - wounded – missing

officers	n. 4
NCOs	n. 6
Graduated specialists / airmen	n. 7
injuries	n. 16

2nd ARMY –ORDER OF BATTLE
Commander Gen. Vittorio Ambrosio (until Jauary 1942).
Chief of Staff Gen. Hector De Blasio.

UNITS EMPLOYED
2 Groups Army Artillery.
1 Group Army Engineers.
9 CC.RR. Battalions
331st Inf. Regt.
4th Bersaglieri Regiment
4th Genoa Cavalry Regiment
7th Alpini Group.
"21 aprile" CC.NN. group
2nd CC.NN. Legion.
7th. CC.NN. Mountain Battalion
8th. CC.NN. Assault. Battalion
4 Mobile Territorial Regts. (154th, 155th, 156th, 157th).
10 Territorial Battalions
9 Garrison Battalions
2 Cavalry Groupings (6 Groups).
5 Guardia di Finanza Battalions
2 Armored Battalion. and 3 armored car groups.
7 Engineer Battalions and 6 various companies.
10 armored trains.
Various services.

G.U IN ARMY RESERVE
1st Celere Div. (Gen. C. Lomaglio).
2nd Celere Div. (Gen. C. Ceriana-Maineri).

XI ARMY CORPS
(Gen. M. Robotti)
2 machinegun Battalions.
4 Engineer Battalions
XI G.A.F. Grouping[482]

They are loaded on a Ro-37 thermo-bombs for a mission against partisan bands of the EPLJ Aerial Observation wards were intensively used to tackle the situation.

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Launched from low altitude without a parachute, the packages expanded upon touching the ground due to the pressure of the load and if the envelope of the first bag could not resist, there was always a second and possibly a third bag capable of guaranteeing the preservation of the load under any stress.

SUMMARY OF WAR ACTIVITY

Missions performed	n. 1,552
Flight hours performed	n. 5,160
Aircraft used	n. 2,486
Aircraft lost in action	n. 5
Aircraft stricken for accidents	n. 7

Note:
Aircraft used: BR.20, Ca.311, Ro.37 (Bis), SM. 81 Ca.133, Ca.101, Ca.111, G.8, Ca.164, Rogožarski Fizir, FN.305, Cant.50l. Occasionally MC.200.

WAR ACTIVITY SLO.DA.AIR FORCE
(Period 1 July 1941/31 Dec. 1941)

Bombers /Recon

Missions performed	n.432
Flight hours performed	n.910
Used aircraft	n.1026
Amount of explosives launched	18,000 kg.
Aircraft lost in action	n.2
Aircraft stricken for accidents	n.3
Strafing - shots fired	n. 16,500

Transport /links

Missions performed	n.1,120
Flight hours performed	n.4,250
Aircraft Used	n.1,460
Aircraft lost in action	n.3
Aircraft stricken for accidents	n.4
quantities of materials transported/Air dropped	130,000 kg.
Personnel transported or evacuated	n.260[483]

Air supply container mod. Bordini are loaded on a three-engine to supply the besieged garrisons by partisans only accessible by air. The guerrilla war in Yugoslavia caused a continuous drip of losses.

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"Macerata" Inf. Div. (Gen. E. Quarra).
"Isonzo" Inf. Div. (Gen. F. Romero).
"Cacciatori delle Alpi" Inf. Div. (Gen. A. Pivano).
"Granatieri di Sardegna" Inf. Div. (Gen. T. Orlando).

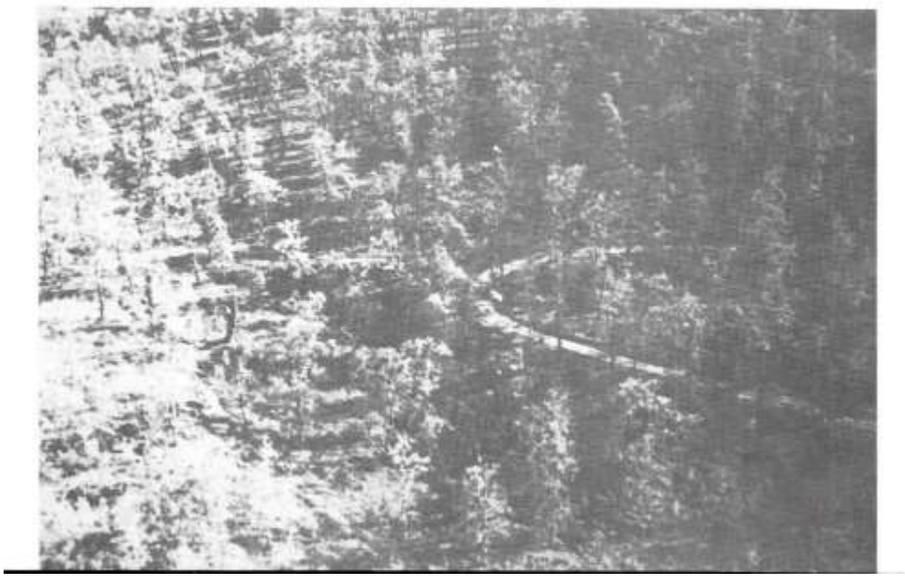
V ARMY CORPS
(Gen. R. Balocco)
2 machinegun Battalions.
2 Engineer Battalions.
5th Artillery Grouping.
V G.A.F. Grouping
"Lombardia" Inf. Div. (Gen. V. Zatti).
"Re" Inf. Div. (Gen. B. Fiorenzuoli).
XIV Coastal Brigade (Gen. A. Amato).

XVIII ARMY CORPS
(Gen. Q. Armellini)
Troops and various services.
"Bergamo" Inf. Div. (Gen. P. Belletti).
"Perugia" Inf. Div. (Gen. R. Pentimalli).
"Zara" Inf. Div. (Gen. Viale C.).
XVII Coastal Brigade (Gen. A. Cigala Fulgosi).

XI ARMY CORPS
(Gen. R. Dalmazzo)
6th Artillery Grouping.
2 machinegun Battalions.
Troops and various services.
"Marche" Inf. Div. (Gen. G. Friend).
"Sassari" Inf. Div. (Gen. F. Monticelli).
"Messina" Inf. Div. (Gen. C. Tucci).
"Murge" Inf. Div. (Gen. P. Negri).
XXVIII Coastal Brigade (Gen. A. Rocca).
Garrison divisions "Veneto" and "Novara."

ROYAL NAVY
Naval Command- Sussak River.
Naval Command Dalmatia.
Naval Command Ragusa.
Naval Command Ploca.
Aviation Command Upper Adriatic- Pola.
149th Sqd. R.M. - Pola / Puntisella 7 Cant.501.
143rd Sqd. R.M. -Venezia /S. Andrea 8 Cant.501.
coastal surveillance and Antisom from the 45°-42° parallel.[484]

Over flight at low altitude. In these difficult conditions they had to operate Italians airmen in the Balkans, rough terrain, rugged mountains, forests were the ideal terrain for Yugoslavian guerrillas.



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A three-engine employed to supply by air the Herzegovina garrison for a mission to airdrop materials.

A cigarette at the end of a hard war mission. The OA personnel acquitted with great commitment, dedication and sacrifice a grave responsibility to control the situation and connect the numerous garrisons isolated by partisans.

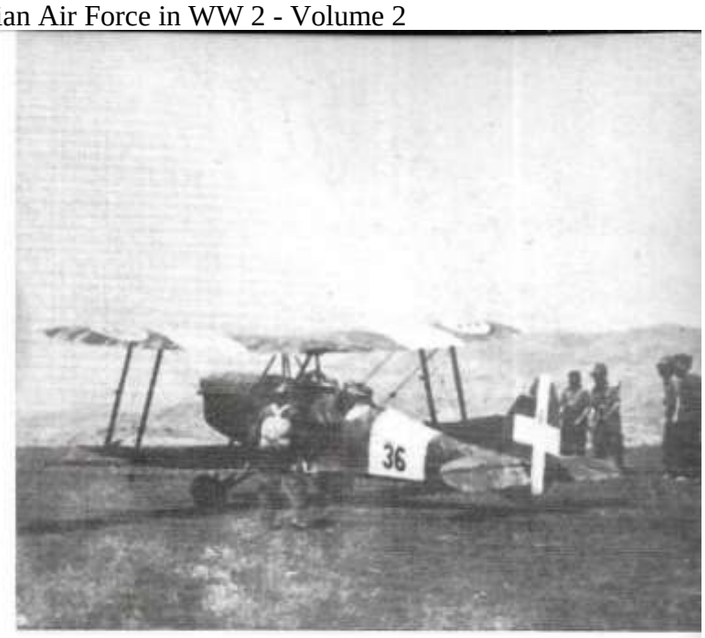
For antisubmarine defense had been put in place net obstructions for development of 16,000 meters and mine obstructions for the port to 3,500 m, installed or active batteries with 26 pieces of coastal artillery and 23 anti-aircraft to protection of the main naval bases: mouth of Cattaro, Sebenico, Tivat; brought into use semaphore stations, stations R.T./R.G. and barriers with mines.

ROYAL AIR FORCE

2nd Army Aviation Command -Sussak.

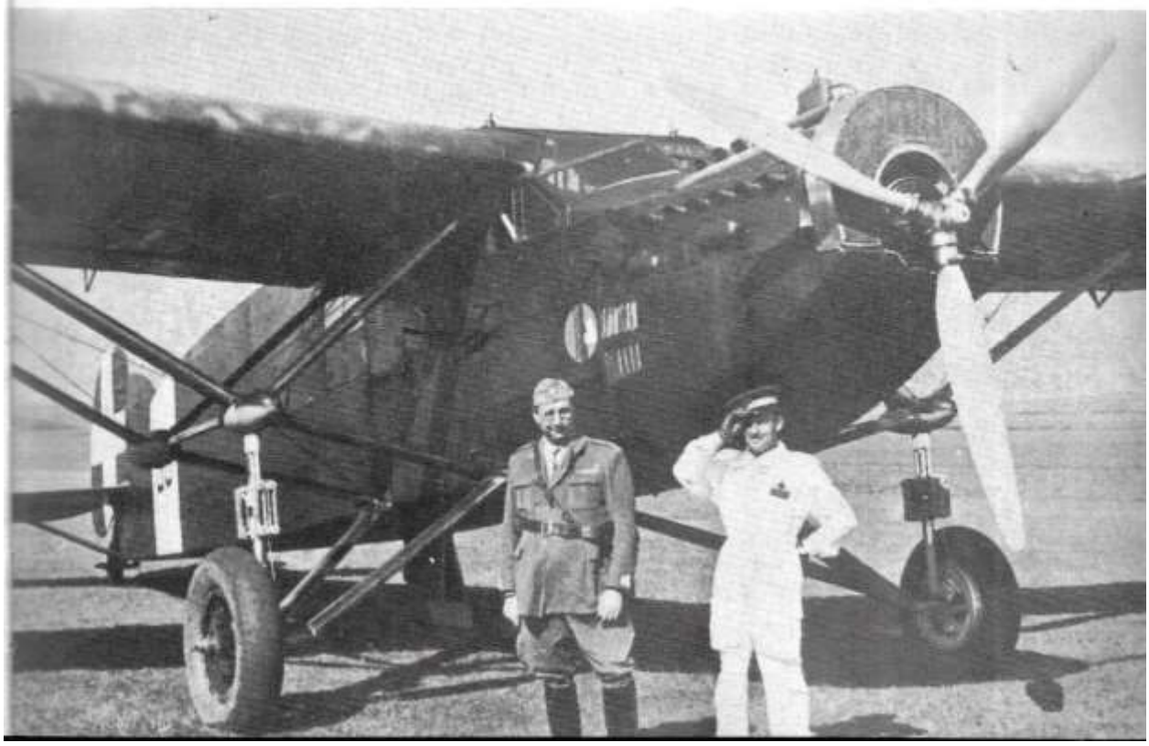
63rd Group O.A. (Sqd. 41st/ 113th) with 14 Ro.37 Udine / Campoformido.

61st Group O.A. (Sqd. 34th/ 128th) with 16 Ca.311 Mostar (later replaced with the 71st Group O.A.).[485]



A small Ca. 164 from a flight school of the RA, used in Yugoslavia by the 36th Sqd OA for connection missions, control and anti-guerrilla surveillance.

Capt. Greco commander the 36th Sqd. Autonomous O.A. together with Gen. Aliberti of the R.E. -Numerous praise and rewards were sent by Army Aviation Command to the men of the O.A.



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CHAPTER EIGHT
The activity of S.A.S. and the Aircraft Communication unit

The S.A.S. - The unit of Aerial Communication - The activity of S.A.S. and the Aircraft Communication unit.[486]

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CHAPTER EIGHT
The activity of S.A.S. and the Aircraft Communication Unit

THE SAS - The Unit of Aircraft Communication

The activities of the military transport aircraft and militarized in 1941, was considerably wider than that performed in the first 6 months of 1940 war, as the demands and needs of the Italian Armed Forces and civilian needs related to international agreements and treaties, is proved higher and more demanding every optimistic forecast.

Everywhere was required transport and aviation intervention was not always possible to meet all requirements due to the unavailability of the aircraft, the modest amount of organic logistic units who also had suffered during the year a big increase with the establishment of new transport groups and the conversion of 18th Stormo BT into a transportation wing. That decision was the finding material impossibility to create from scratch a nonexistent logistics at the beginning of the conflict, military events and urgent needs had driven it to be urgently to address pressing intervention requests.

The ordering of the CSAS whose command was always held by Gen. D.A. Vincenzo Velardi replacing Gen. Aurelio Liotta, saw the presence of Col. Padovani Ezio as Chief of Staff after the replacement of Lt. Col. Klinger who had been assigned to the command of the 114th Independent Bombardment Group Specially equipped with SM. 82/B for long range missions equipped with release mechanism for the FFF motor-bomb; of Lt. Col. Gino Bertoli in charge of international connections LATI with South America and the fuel supply to the island base of Sale in the Atlantic, of Col. Ugo Draghelli and Alfredo Preceruti the SAS officers in command, Lt. Col. Julius Deputy Chief of the G.S., by Lt. Col. Caesar Sacconi Service Chief Staff, Col. Leo Leonello Chief of the Office Operations, Lt. Col. Giuseppe Torrisi, Chief of the Transport Office.

Civil aviation chiefly acting increasingly as an administrative dependency on the A.C.T.A. General Management, entrusted to Gen. S.A. Mario Bernasconi but operationally employed by the CSAS with Communication Planes Unit, had undergone significant changes in the responsible except Col. Coop substituted the N.C.L Command. (LATI) of Lt. Col. Carlo Tonini.

The activities of the SAS

The focus of the transport service of the R.A. was also centralized in 1941 the three-engine SM.82 from now produced as a transport in large series, who had given excellent tests for robustness, reliability and operational on all war fronts. [487]

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As a first effect of placing a substantial number of SM.82 in service, there had been a change in the existing groups for the past with standard shipping in the form of new large three-engine and in particular groups of 147th and 148th had given their SM.73/SM.75 to the NCA and also 145th had started getting the SM.82 joined to SM.75 long operating in Libya.

70 copies ordered and placed into service in 1940 they were joined by another 80 in 1941, increasing the size of the units and allowing the creation of new transport groups and the conversion of others: 148th Group (Sqd. 605th/606th); 149th (Sqd. 608th/607th), 145th Group T (Maj. Fortunato Barbieri) had been intended to N.A. and the two squadrons (604th/610th) assigned to the command of 5th Air Fleet of Libya; had been formed *ex novo* the 146th Group T (Sqd. 603rd/609th) (Maj. Felix Santini), the 149th had been taken over by Lt. Col. Giovanni Buonamico while Lt. Col. Giuseppe Cartoni had been assigned to the command of the future 144th Group T. The 147th had Sqd. 601st/602nd, under the command of the 148th had gone Maj. Mario Ferruzzi.

The final phase of the campaign in Greece saw a large participation of transport aircraft from bases of Puglia to Albania and the Albanians to the first lines airports for troop transport and launch supplies.

On the day of 23 March had been transported 115 tons of materials, 118 the previous day with 20 liters[3] airdrop of supplies and airlift of 760 soldiers, 124 tons the 21st with 700 soldiers. The Trasgerma Luftwaffe Group had arrived on January 24 the record of transport with 33 Ju.52, 31 tons of materials, transported 433 soldiers and the evacuation of 90 wounded.

The greatest worry of the CSAS was retention of links with the E.A. becoming increasingly difficult and problematic as a result of the negative trend of military operations, with the loss of the support bases of Gura first and Zula later and with the maintenance at all costs of the Gondar airport reached the fort until the last days of the resistance. The airfield position of Azozò place 35 km south of Gondar, had been amplified by a message of Gen. Santoro (n. B/14694 of 08/13/41) which based on what he had written to Col. Busoni, the Air Force commander of the fortress,[488] notified the airport location at the junction of the Azozò-Gorgora roadway with Azozò Debra-Tabor Road to facilitate the topographic identification of the landing spot.

The SAS intensifies its work in carrying to N.A and in distant I.E.A.: men. materials, mail, aircraft, engines, various equipment. A MS. 82 of the 608th Sqd T loading various materials.

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The field of cross-linked fence and defended by the fire centers manned by national and colonial soldiers, disposal of 19,000 kg of gasoline 87 N.O., 8,000 kg of castor oil and 1,800 kg of RA mineral oil, able thus to guarantee supplies for at least 6 trips fully loaded of fuel/lubricant.

An urgent mission with the SM.82 of the 229th Sqd. was made with order n. 11669/12A of 1/26/41 to carry on the airport of Rajak in Syria a delegation of CIAF and 4 SM.82 had performed in the months following transport of materials and personnel on the Syrian airports in the most acute period of the crisis in relations between the Vichy authorities and the British government.

The transport missions ordered with 1B/9489 of 05/19/41 had also been available carried out in Iraq during the coup of Rashid Alì, with the participation of 4 SM.82 of the149th Group T for a total of 162 flying hours and the transfer of about 20 tons of war material for the Kurdish rebels and the evacuation of 102 passengers between military and civilians, and among these five Iraqi airmen: Maj. Ibrahim, pilots Juwad and Jsmail Fattach, the officer was Hassan Hird, Sgt. mot. Fawzi Mohamed el and Sgt. radio operator Mohamed Fadil that were started to the School of flight without visibility form Littoria for a postgraduate course.

At the end of 1941 they were in service 120 SM.82 between transport groups and bomber units and at that time had been lost for 27 SM.82 for war causes or accidents.

The greater use in a single day occurred in September with the presence of 70 hours in flight of a SM.82 of different directions, but this record was surpassed in December with 107 by a SM.82 in direct transport activities many to Libya to stem the enemy offensive with "Crusader".

In the fall it had been turned into a transport unit the 18th Stormo BT (Col. Paolo Altan) which made use of the 37th Group (Maj. Pietro Lauri Filzi) with SM.82 assigned to squadrons 47th (Capt. L. Guidoni) and 48th (Capt. E. Valenti) while the other group of the 56th Stormo (Lt. Col. Luigi Marini) with Sqd. 222nd (Capt. S. Guidozzi) and 223rd (Capt. B. Tixi) was equipped with SM.81.

The 18th Stormo T arranged to provide through 56th Group personnel and flight material to form squadrons assigned to the CSIR named numerically 245th, 246th and 247th and gradually sent to the eastern front after the establishment of the Italian air base at Bucharest/Baneasa (airport 80/PM.3300) occurred on 9/13/41 entrusted to Capt. Ernesto Caprioglio.

An air link service between Rome and Tudora (Romania) biweekly had been activated with departures on Mondays and Fridays and return between Saturday and Wednesday. The first section was performed with SM.75 (I-LIAN and I-LAVO) and SM.73 between Rome and Bucharest, while the second from Bucharest to Tudora was accomplished with SM.81 with continuation until Kriwo/Rog (call sign CD.8) also using a core of a liaison aircraft (4 Ca. 100 and 1 Fiat.G.8). It was significantly increased in 1941 flight activity for the needs of the Parachute School at Tarquinia, which was assigned a SM.82 for training and posted from time to time other multiengine for special airdrop operations.

A curious incident occurred in 1941, when the G.S.A. saw fit to re-start the production line of SM.81, the Ca.133 and Ca.148 interrupted for years as no longer deemed suitable to the 1st line.

Received orders for more than 140 multi-engine Caproni/Vizzola, workshops S. Giorgio di Pistoia and Savigliano, and the AVIS of Gastellammare di Stabia.

Another 165 SM.81 ceded by BT units were in the process of transformation for the cargo version and other needs of war: complementary groups, health squadrons, G.U.A. flight units, specialty schools, special purpose.

Between May and September the SAS command agree with that of Esercitavia, sent from time to time 3 to 5 SM.82 to the Tarquinia School, with an oscillating frequency between 3-4 monthly tactical air landing operations at company level (28 paratroopers per aircraft) and experimental launch of heavy materials (antitank cannon of 47/32) launched by the lower doors with a cluster of four parachutes. Had been made a special version of SM.82/P (Paratroopers) with equipment designed by the headquarters of the Parachute School experiences and installed from the workshops of the National Aeronautical Company of Rome/Littorio, consisting of a 10 mm steel cable in the internal center of the fuselage and anchored at the side doors necessary for fastening the hooks of the bridle, accompanied by an audible - light device actuated by the pilot in the area of launch to report to launch director conducting the necessary steps to jump from the plane.[489]

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The SAS command had taken direct agreements with the OBS to coordinate the transport activities for the DAK entrusted to Col. Berkenoff and the field section of the Luftwaffe existing on the airport of Castelvetrano.

In the spring of 1941 he had been tested the first prototype of the three-engined Fiat G.12 initially conceived as passenger aircraft and subsequently amended in several versions for military transport. The technical evaluation must be operated was in progress at the first CSA of Guidonia. The 01 Oct. 1941 Gen. Cavallero with dispatch CS. n. 8168 reported to the Duce the situation of air transport for N.A., in anticipation of having to face the dual need to ensure the minimum necessary the activity of fighter by unit to inject in Libya in an emergency situation, according to the plan prepared by Superaereo (aviation gasoline for a working week), guarantee a minimum of material turnout for the various needs of the Armed Forces and implement in time with if the conditions had allowed him, the transport of the Army G.U. personnel assigned reinforcement to Supercomando N.A. or reinsertion of complements to the G.U. already in place, implementing the provisions of the Duce to transfer the soldiers to Libya by plane and heavy materials with merchant ships.

The availability of transport aircraft to fulfill these needs and outside of normal service tasks, (offensive action Gibraltar / Alexandria, supplies CAT., Torpedoes transport Aegean/Libya, urgent transport materials for the Armed Forces in Libya/Aegean/Albania) ascended just 40 SM.82, whose carrying capacity in relation to the distance to be traveled and the type of material to be transported or the number of people to be transferred, was thus divided:

Distance 1,000 km., 3,500 kg material, men n. 35
Distance 2000 km., 2,500 kg material men n. 25
Distance 2500 km., 1,600 kg material, men n. 16

The SAS units used for such tasks were the following:

146th Group T (2 Sqd.) With 13 SM.82 -based Aerop. Littorio -Sicily/Tripolitania.
147th Group T (2 Sqd.) With 16 SM.82/G.12 -based Aerop. Ciampino N. - Cyrenaica/Aegean.
148th Group T (2 Sqd.) With 13 SM.73/82/83 -based Aerop. Ciampino N. - Cyrenaica - CSIR- Tunisia.
149th Group T (2 Sqd.) With 15 SM.82 -based Aerop. Littorio -Tripolitania.
2 Sqd. autonomous T (5th Air Fleet) SM. 821 75/74 to Libyan territory.
Total n. 73 multi-engine.

Negative circumstances of war would, however, reduced the expected shipping schedule by 50% first and 40% thereafter. Simultaneously to the increase in transport units, is an increase in the navigator of SAS staff was that he had exceeded 450 pilots between military/militarized and about 2,400 specialists for the flight crews.

Gradually but surely, the CSAS was assuming the larger size used for personal, multi-engine used, the commitments to be undertaken.

Much had been done in the first 18 months of the war but much still remained to be done to address the many needs that do not use frugally commands, personnel, specialists.

AIR COMMUNICATION UNITS

Before discussing the events occurred in 1941 both in the NCA, we consider it appropriate to mention the activity of other transport aircraft that although not classified as military aircraft and those of organic militarized detachments of SAS/NCA, contributed usefully and to varying degrees satisfy needs and requests of the Army command, the Air and Army G.S..

Ca.111 Ca.133 aircraft and were being used by the I.G.M. (Florence Military Geographical Institute) for aerial-photographical mapping, by ZAT commands, atmospheric surveys, the O.A.T. School of Cerveteri for the official training by the O.A. and at that of Tarquinia to launch experiments with mannequins, parachute men and aviation launch of materials, for the autonomous squadron aerial-photographic service.

The 611th Sqd. T Albania remained in 1941 with only two surviving twin-engine Ba.44, I-AIRA and I-ORIO, was integrated with the allocation of 6 Ca.312 Bis twin-engine registered I-BUIA, I-BUIB, I-BUIC, I-BUID, I-BUIF, I-BUIG taken from a former committed of 24 aircraft for Belgian aviation.[490]

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The twin-engine Caproni with Piaggio P.XVI engines of 550 HP, was flying to 420 km/h and could carry up to six passengers in addition to the three-man crew with a range of 1400 kilometers. The squadron was also awarded a twin-engine "Borea" Ca.308 (I-INTRA) with carrier of 6 plus 2 plus 1 radio operator pilots passenger capacity, with engines "Gipsy" D.H. 185 HP, speed 246 km/h and autonomy of 870 km.

These small twin-engine rendered valuable services by connecting the main Albanian cities and making transport missions in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Greece.

The multi-engine transport located in E.A., were almost all lost in war operations and only some planes were able to reach Italy with large and adventurous adventures. They were destroyed the Ca.148/C I-GOGG, I-TESS, I-SOMA and I-NEGH and only the I-ETIO managed to escape before reaching Libya and then the motherland; the three-engined SM.73 managed to leave E.A. the following aircraft: I-VADO, I-ARCO and I-NOVI and were lost aircraft I-SETI, I-ELVO and I-OLDA for war causes.

The smaller amount of the SM.74 of the four-engine 604th Sqd. operating in Libya, two of which were lost by the war causes in 1941 and only the aircraft I-ROME remained on duty to represent an excellent and versatile multi-protagonist of many peaceful trips in peace and in war adventurous events.

More challenging activities of the three-engined SM.83 assigned links with South America, in business travel between Italy and North Africa and the Aegean, the French North Africa at the CIAF service. In 1941 he had been lost only the three-engine I-PERS shot down by enemy fighters in the Aegean during the return flight to Rhodes via Athens. Lt. Col. Federici Commander of the 41st Group independent BT died with the other members of the crew.

During the year they were acquired and assigned to N.E.C. 4 SM.83 former LARES amounting to £. 5,654,880.

More regular activity of the Ala Littoria Ju.52 engaged in the connections with Germany on Monaco-Berlin route, and the two Douglas DC.2/DC.3 assigned connections with Albania.

Precious was the contribution in sea rescue squadrons of S.66 and Cant.506 seaplanes, four of which in new enterprise were placed into service in 1941 together with specimens of war converted into rescue version.

Over fifty survivors were rescued, mostly Italians, Germans and British airmen recovered at sea during the year.

More vast and varied the activities of Cant.506/C of the NCAL committed on the remaining routes of the Mediterranean to transport military and civilian passengers, materials and correspondence.

Cant.506 I-DOMI was lost being shoot down the strafed by a British bi-motor on July 22 first while flying, then on the sea after the ditching followed by fire, while the enemy pilots raged on surviving crewmen killed or wounded in the water clinging to wreckage with only two survivors rescued, one of them seriously injured.

The mail arrives from the Motherland with the big three-engine of SAS. The airmen are crowded around the aircraft to exchange news, to hear the news; ask for favors, to know the newcomers.

In 1941 it became part of the NCAL new seaplanes I-DELT, I-DAYO and I-DICO built by the CRDA in the first 6 months of the year in the passenger version and SM.87 I-ILLA, I-INNO and I-IGEA. The twin-engine Macchi C.94 continued to perform passenger service between Italy and Spain, together with the three-engined flying boat Macchi C.100, used later also in addition Adriatic connections between Trieste and Dalmatia in the second half of 1941, after ceding to three-engined SIAI flying boat of the routes Rome-Balearic-Barcelona - long and more demanding.[491]

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The Macchi C.100 I-PACE was lost in an accident on July 30 during an unsuccessful attempt to ditch at the Ostia Lido seaplane base.

The excellent twin-engine Fiat G.18/V of the Italian Airlines, also interior connections with Albania, began in 1941 to work in Eastern Europe again between Venice-Budapest-Zagreb pooled with the Hungarian MALERT, with a service performed as always with the usual regularity and efficiency.

On the Atlantic route to South America, the LATI began to commission as well as SM.83 and 82/C also SM.75 and the first copy of the most powerful SM.76.

The excellent three-engine SIAI SM.75 was present civil and Italian military aviation with over twenty SM.75 distributed between transport groups and the NCAL-NCL used to connections with N.A. and Brazil.

Antiaircraft station of the R.E. with gun 75/46. pointing exercise on a three-engine Ju 52 flying over Sicily. During the year it was assigned the new A/A cannon 90/53 by Ansaldo.

On March 15, the three-engine I-TITO (Captain Attilio Canzini) in return from Tripoli to Rome as it flew at 2,500 m above sea level, about 50 kilometers west of Ustica, was attacked and strafed by a Bristol Blenheim escort to a British convoy.[492]

A group of officers of the G.S. of the SAS - The organization of the military transport had during 1941 a significant development by expanding organic and services. setting up new departments, receiving numerous multiengine SM 82.

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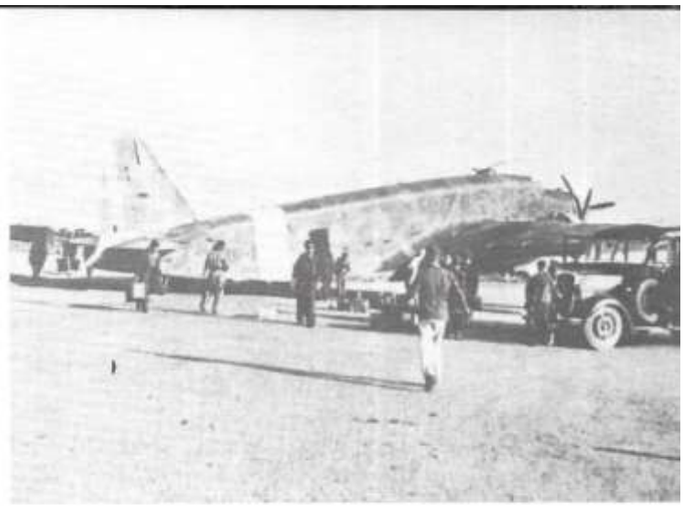


Preparations for the start of an SM 82 of the 607th Sqd.T. The existing four transport groups in June 1940 had increased to 9 at the end of 1941 over three autonomous squadrons, about 120 airplanes.

Implementing an emergency route to Commander Canzini managed to get away from the danger zone, to hearten the passengers and to observe the no major damage reported by the aircraft that allowed the continuation of regular flight up to Rome/Littorio.

Used intensively a bit anywhere with SAS, the NCAL and NCL, in connections with the Aegean, E.A., N.A, he Russia, SM.75 were operating on the Atlantic route, and on line with Lisbon of great international interest.

In 1941 they were placed into service SM.75 airplanes registered I-BURA, I-LITT, I-BLAN, I-TELO to replace the two SM.75 lost for war causes during the year: I-LUSS and I -LUNO, and the same year entered in the NCL the SM.82/C I-BACH that was joined to the existing I-BATO, I-BOLI, I-BRAZ, assigned to the links with South America and occasional transport for emergency reasons between Italy and North Africa.

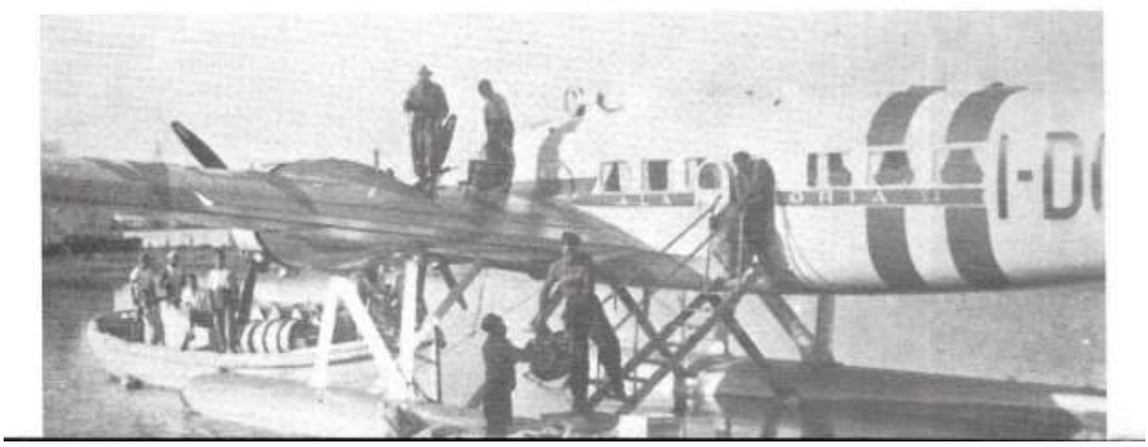
Much reliance is made on the new three-engined Fiat G.12 the first prototype was added in 1941 the specimen registered I-ALIB followed by the aircraft I-FEMI, I-FIER put in evaluation at the CSA and the CSAS (147th Group T .) in the initial versions TR/CR, the first of a series of 50 three-engine set by Aeritalia, then allocated for testing for military transport to the 148th Group T. waiting for the company to arrange to eliminate certain drawbacks established by the military testers.

It had meanwhile been subjected to evaluation and fine-tuning the giant four-engine seaplane Cant.Z.511 capable of flying at over 400 km / h with an autonomy of 5,100 km and the capacity to carry 48 passengers plus crew of 6 men; intended to transatlantic connections, the larger aircraft had to be used in the G.S./RA intentions for a series of bold initiatives to disappear for various reasons one behind the other.

The entry into the war against the US and muted political conditions that led Brazil to take the side of the Allies, were the reasons that led to the end of 1941 to requisition the Italian LATI planes that were in Brazil.

Requisitioned were the following aircraft:
SM.75 I-BUEN and I-BLAN
SM.76 I- CILE
SM.82/C I-BOLI
SM.83 I-ATOS
Fiat G.2 I-BIMU
and also 8 Alfa 128 engines and 80 crates of material of respect for a total of 14,978,000 Lire.[493]

Refueling operations to a Cant 506 I-DOMI (N.C. 3629) of the NCAL - This seaplane passengers operating on the Lido/Rome to Tripoli line rendered valuable services in the transport and rescue shipwrecked refugees.



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The situation of flight material of the SAS/NCA in August 1941 appeared thus:

SM.81	56th Group T -Viterbo	n. 2
	RD. at Agusta/Cascina Costa	n. 4
	RD. at SIAI/Jesi	n. 5
	RD. at Off. S. Giorgio/Pistoia	n. 3
	RD. at Caproni/Predappio	n. 3
	RD. at Off. Savigliano	n. 1
	222nd Sqd. T -Viterbo	n. 8
	202nd Sqd. BT -Rhodes	n. 1
	MSA Depot -Tripoli	n. 1
	Sec. All.to flight -Albania	n. 3
	SRAM -Alghero	n. 1
	CSIR	n. 6
		Total n. 45
	SM.84/B MM. 44.6 NCAL/Roma	n. 1
	SM.73 RD. Caproni/Taliedo	n. 4
	RD. CNA/Roma- Littorio	n. 2
	RD. Caproni/Elmas	n. 1
	RD. SIAI/Sesto Calende	n. 2
	MSA Depot/Ciampino	n. 2
	148th Group T/Ciampino	n. 3
	SRAM/Ciampino	n. 1
		Total n. 15
P.23	MM.282-1° CSA/Guidonia	n. 1
S.66	613th Sqd.S -Elmas	n. 4
	NCAL-Lido di Roma	n. 1
SM.87	NCAL/Lido di Roma	n. 2
Cant.506/S	RD. Saiman-Lido di Roma	n. 1
	RD. Soc. Basins/Scali-Napoli	n. 1
	Sec. Aid/Rhodes	n. 1
	Sec. Aid/Libya	n. 2
		Total n. 5
G.12 / T	147th Group T/Ciampino	n. 1
SM.83	RD. CNA-Roma/Littorio	n. 2
	RD. SIAI/Sesto Calende	n. 1
	148th Group T -Ciampino	n. 3
	NCL - Guidonia	n. 8
		Total n. 15
SM.82	RD. Recife (Brazil)	n. 1
	RD. CNA- Roma/Littorio	n. 11
	RD. NCL - Guidonia	n. 3
	MSA Depot - Tripoli	n. 1
	Sec. T Au. T-Libya	n. 1
	47th Sqd. T -Aviano	n. 2
	48th Sqd. T -Aviano	n. 3
	146th Group T-Roma/Littorio	n. 6
	14 th Group T/Ciampino	n. 11
	148th Group T/Ciampino	n. 1
	149th Group T-Roma/Littorio	n. 27
		Total n. 67
DC.3	149th Group T-Roma/Littorio	n. 1
MC.94	RS. Roma/Centocelle	n. 3
	NCAL-Roma	n. 4
	NCAL-Trieste	n. 1
		Total n. 9
APR.2	NCA-Milano	n. 1
DC.2	RS. SRAM/Tirana	n. 1
Fiat G.18 (V)	NCA-Milano	n. 7
	RD. Milano/Linate	n. 2
		Total n. 9
MC.100	NCAL-Roma/Littorio	n. 2
SM.74	Sec. Aut. T. Libya	n. 2
	RD. SLAI / Sesto Calende	n. 1
SM.76	NCL..Guidonia	n. 1
SM.75	RD. CNA-Roma / Littorio	n. 2
	RD. SIAI -Sesto Calende	n. 2
	RS. SRAM-Roma / Littorio	n. 1
	147th T-Ciampino Group	n. 2
	149th T-Roma Group / Littorio	n. 2
	Command Air Force / Libya	n. 4
	Rep. Aut. T - Libya	n. 4
	NCAL-Roma / Littorio	n. 10
	NCL /Guidonia	n. 3
		Total n.30
Ba.44	Rep. Aut. T.-Albania	n. 4
Borea	Rep. Aut. T. Albania	n. 1
Ca.11l	Airport Command Littoria	n. 2
Ca.133/2	4 / Group CT-Elmas	n. 1
	RD. Caproni/Vizzola	n. 1
	May 20 Central R.A.	n. 1
	16th Sqd. P .C.-Libya	n. 1
	74th Sqd. CT -Trapani	n. 1
	86th Sqd. CT -Comiso	n. 1
	95th Sqd , CT.Caselle	n. 1[494]

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151st Sqd. CT-Martuba		n. 1
153rd Sqd. CT- Sorman		n. 1
351st Sqd. CT - Castelbenito	n. 1	
352nd Sqd. CT-Martuba		n. 1
353rd Sqd. CT-Martuba		n. 1
355th Sqd. CT -Alghero		n. 1,
358th Sqd. CT-Ravenna		n. 1
360th Sqd. CT- Benghazi		n. 1
362nd Sqd. CT - CSIR		n. 1
364th Sqd. CT-Tirana	n. 1	
365th Sqd. CT-Araxos		n. 1
367th Sqd. CT-Treviso		n. 1
369th Sqd. CT-CSIR	n. 1	
371st Sqd. CT-CSIR	n. 1	
372nd Sqd. CT- Derna	n. 1	
374th Sqd. CT- Derna	n. 1	
378th Sqd. CT-Castelbenito	n. 2	
393rd Sqd. CT Benghazi		n. 1
airport command Tripoli		n. 2
RD. Benghazi		n. 1
RD. Menelaus		n. 1
RS. SRAM- Tirana	n. 1	
RS. SRAM Sqd. Aut. 1st ZAT-Bresso	n. 1	
Sqd. Aut. 3rd ZAT-Centocelle	n. 1	
Squ. Aut. Command R.A. Sicily	n. 1	
Sec. P-Centocelle	n. 2	
Sqd. Specialists-Capodichino	n. 2	
1st CSA Guidonia	n. 1	
School Paracadutisti- Tarquinia	n. 33	
Flight School - Capua		n. 3
RS-SRAM-Poggio Renatico	n. 1	
1st. Geographic Mil.-Florence	n. 1	
		Total 76.
Ju.52/3m RD. Off. Aeronavali-Venezia L .	n. 2	
NCAL		n. 2
		Total no. 4

The combined total of transport aircraft available on the date of such, including those in allocation to the fighter units for technical and logistical support, amounted to 313 specimens belonging to 24 different models.

Activities Italian Civil Aviation (1941)

Airlines length in km	Km. Flown	Flying hours	Passengers transported	mail kg newspapers Kg	Goods/Storage Kg
38,300	5,873,428	22,514	82,885	1,566,222+	1,446,996+
				179,040	692,747
				1,745,262	2,139,743

Note: Compared to 1940 the length in kilometers of the national-Italian international air network was reduced by 56%.
Compared to 1939 the number of Km flown had been reduced by 68% and the number of flight hours was below 3/5, that of passengers was less than 63%, and 50% less was the amount of mail.

Situation at 30/09/1941
flight Material CSAS/N.C.A.

S.M.82 n. 77 available: 45 used for N.A.
10 to the 37th Gruppo T. (18th Stormo)
5 available to the DAK
10 in repair for modifications at SIAI

SM.82 n. 18 at SRAM
Total n. 95[495]

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SM.81 n. 45 available: 22 at 56th T Group (18th Stormo)
8 at CSIR
3 in Albania
1 in Libya
11 in transformation from civilian workshops
n. 26 reserve pending BT transformations to T
Total n. 71
SM. 82/C n. 3 Nucleus Communications LATI.
SM.83 n. 9 LATI (line Rome-Island of Sale - Natal-Bahia-Rio de Janeiro the 10,870 km)
n. 4 CSAS for CIAF (Rome-Casablanca)
n. 2 under repair
SM.75 n. 29 Nucleus Communications Ala Littoria
SM.76 n. 1 Ala Littoria (line 400) (Rome-Barcelona):
SM.75 n. 11 Ala Littoria (Libya-Albania-Romania-Aegean-Greece-E.A)
n. 16 Under repair at local workshops
Fiat G.18 n. 9 Nucleus Communications Airlines (Line 429/472/554) Milan-Budapest-Tirana- Brindisi- Tirana – Bucarest.
MC.94/MC.100 N.10 Nucleus Communications Ala Littoria (Line 400 / C-411) Roma-Cagliari-Alghero-Pollina; (451/452/4531 Line Ancona-Zara- Trieste-Lussino-Spalato.

Among the lines suppressed in 1940-41 included the following routes:

Rome-Basra	(3,919 km)	Ala Littoria
Rome-Sofia	(1,3165 km)	
Roma - Constance	(1,432 km)	
Rome-Gdynia	(1,957 km)	Italian Airlines pooled with LOT and MALERT
Rome-Prague	(1,350 km)	Ala Littoria
Rome-Amsterdam	(1,526 km)	Italian Airlines pooled with Lufthansa and KLM
Venice-London	(1,404 km)	
Milan-Brussels	(770 km)	
Turin-Belgrade	(1,099 km)	Italian Airlines polled with Aeoroput and LARES
Genoa-Tunis	(1,083 km)	Ala Littoria
Rome-Paris	(1,410 km)	
Rome-Cadiz	(2,040 km)	
Melilla-Malaga	(220 km)	
Melilla-Lisbon	(703 km)	
Melilla- Tetuan	(332 km)	
Rome-Tunis	(1,028 km),	
Rome-Malta	(1,056 km)	
Marsala- Tunis	(231 km)	
Tripoli-Benghazi	(796 km)	
Rome-Addis Ababa	(6,101 km)	

They were partially remained in service with weekly flights to lines of E.A- Addis Ababa-Mogadishu (1,242 km)

Addis Ababa-Asmara	(820 km)
Addis Ababa-Azozò	(702 km)
Addis Ababa-Assab	(771 km)
Addis Ababa-Djibouti	(637 km)[496]

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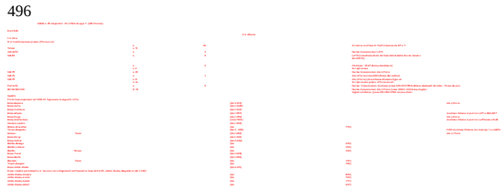

At the end of 1941 the situation of flight material of the Aircraft Communication Nucleus had undergone a restructuring prepared by CSAS according to fulfill new requirements and was divided thus:

	Ala Littoria Nucleus	Aviolinee Nucleus	LATI Nucleus	(1940)
Cant.506	9	-	-	+4
SM.87	4	-	-	+3
S.66	3	-	-	-5
Cant.509	1	-	-	+ 1
MC.94	8	-	-	- 1
MC.100	3	-	-	-
Borea	6	-	-	+2
Ca.312	6	-	-	+6
SM.75	-	-	2	-4
DC.2	1	-	-	-
DC.3	1	-	-	+ 1
Fiat G.18	-	8	-	-1
APR.2	-	1	-	-
SM.82/C	-	-	2	-
SM.83	-	-	10	+7
SM.76	-	-	1	-
Ju.52	4	-	-	-
Total	46	9	15	70

Note: Compared to 41 aircraft assigned to the NCA in June 1940, there had been an increase of 29 aircraft for the highest percentage NCAL and the NCL.

In 1941 compared with a modest increase in the production of multi-engine passenger transport and some requisitions or aircraft purchases at some foreign companies (LARES / MALERT), had recorded the loss for war or accidental causes of 18 passenger aircraft and between them they were worth noting the almost complete disappearance of Ca.148/C of E.A., a reduction to 50% of the four-engined SM.74 who had before the war linked Paris and London with the Ala Littoria doing an excellent and attractive international service. The multi-engine lost in 1941 were as follows:

SM.73	I-OLDA (E.A.)
	I-ENNA (26/Apr./41)
	I-SAUL (11/Jan./41)
	I-SETI (E.A.)
	I-ELVO (E.A.)
Ca.148/C	I-GOGG (E.A.)
	I-TESS (E.A.)
	I-SOMA (E.A.)
	I-NEGH (E.A.)
Fokker F. VII	I-AFRO (E.A.)
SM.74	I-URBE (02/Nov./41)
	I-ALPE (23/Nov./41)
SM.75	I-LUNO (10/06/41)
	I-LUSS (12/02/41)
SM.83	I-PERS (04/July/41)
Cant.506/C	I-DOMI (22/July/41)
M.C.100	I-PACE (07/20/41)
BA.44	I-ORSA (9/Mar./41)

In 1941, were decorated with M.O., for aviation valor (in memory) the following pilots S.A.S.: Lt. Corinth Bellotti, 2nd Lt. Edoardo Manfredini, Capt. Eugenio Miconi, Capt. Nino Zannetti; (living) Capt. Leonardo Bonzi, Lt. Max Peroli and also had the same honor Lt. Col. Mario De Bernardi (living) and Capt. Bruno Mussolini (in memory).[497]

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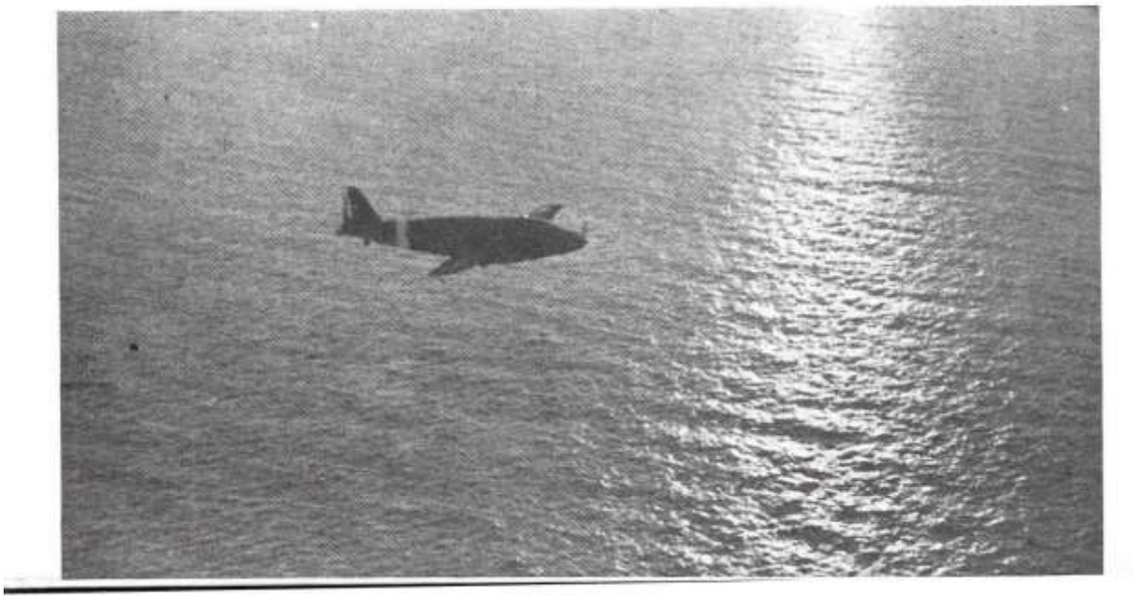
SAS-NCA activities 1941

Aircraft assigned	Destination	n. trips	Hours of Flight	routes km.	civil/military passengers transported	Material Kg	Post Kg
8	E.A.	328*	5,842	1,440,858	1,237 m. 529 c.	274,852	81,404
18	N.A.	9,576	45,545	11,549,459	100,759 m. 52,458 c.	10,119,661	1,636,099
1	ASF, (CIAF)	482	2,270	537,166	2,615 m. 1102 c.	174,550	29,957
11	Albania	6,381	8,375	2,194,067	42.1682 m. 30,284 c.	3,668,337	1,065,722
2	CSIR	189	1,103	249,385	1,234 m. 41 c.	144,254	23,730
2	AEGEAN	733	4,801	1,217,617	5,853 m. 2370 c.	681,825	233,335
12	Atlantic	165	5,731	1,829,155	- m. 815 c.	136,168	68,756
8	Lines Naz.li	3,694	7,190	1,607,066	20,542 m. 32,559 c.	1,130,503	425,844
10	Lines Inter.li	3,566	15,612	3,830,218	8,928 m. 32,896 c.	1,515,168	758,442
70	Total	25,114	96,473	24,454,991	183,850 m. 153,054 c. 236,904	17,845,318	4,323,289

* Including domestic E.A. flights[498].

Striking image of a SM 82 in night flight on the moonlit sea. Particularly challenging for crew were the last flights to reach fort Gondar in I.E.A.



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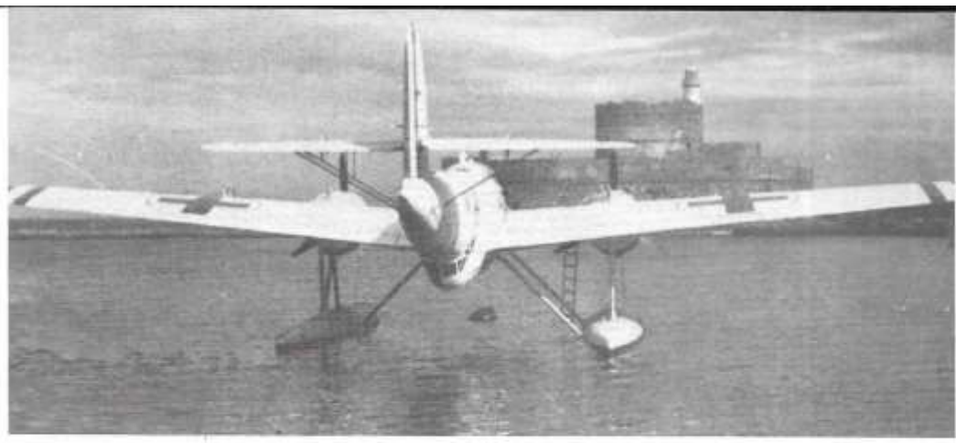
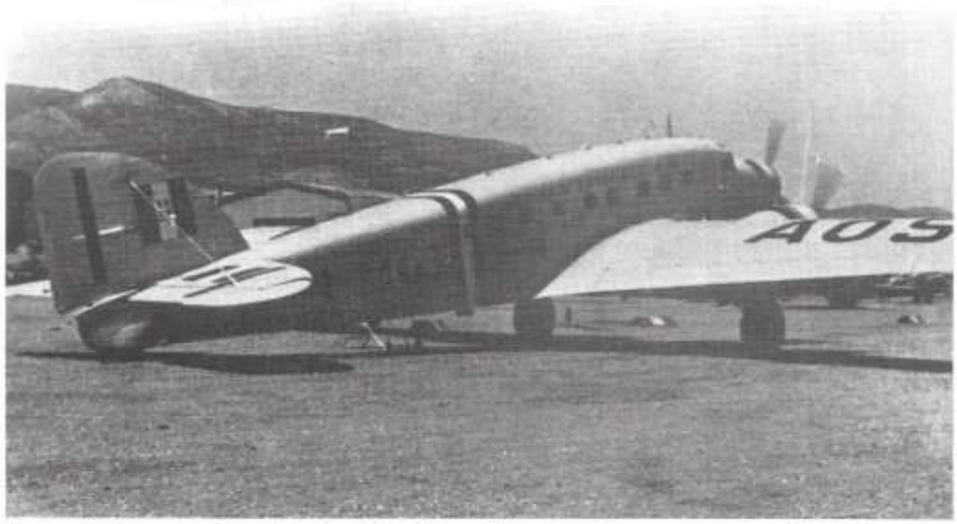


A rescue Cant.506/S moored in the harbor of Rhodes Mandracchiodi. The rescue at sea aviation was strengthened with the establishment of new sections located in the Mediterranean (Collection A Vigna)



The prescribed international ivory color adopted by Italy for civil aircraft used for passenger service A SM.75 (I.LAOS) taking off from an airport (Vigna Collection).

The frugal breakfast of an aircraft crew of the SAS during a stopover during a war mission. In 1941, 46 transport aircraft were lost and 66 passengers and crew members died.

Taranto 07/25/1941 - Delivery of military valor decorations to airmen of the 4th Air Fleet. The Chief of Staff. Gen. Pricolo decorates a specialist for acts of valor. Left Gen. Eraldo Ilari and Capt. Gasperi flight aide.

Chapter Nine
The Schools of the R.A.
the supplementary groups for instructional institutions.

General Command School of the R.A. – The Air Force Academy - The supplementary groups of the R.A. - The Instructional Bodies - Bombing specialties -The Fighter specialties.[499]

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Chapter Nine

The schools of the R.A.
Supplementary groups for instructional institutions

GENERAL COMMAND OF THE SCHOOLS OF THE R.A.

The most important change that occurred in 1941 was the restructuring and the transformation in the General Command of the existing Schools Inspectorate, the establishment of two new groupings divided between flight schools and specialists school and pre-aeronautical.

Gen. D.A. Vittorio Giovine was the first commanding general of the schools in 1941 and the Col. Venceslao D'Aurelio and Giovanni Coppi the two managers of the groupings.

At the end of the year, with the advent of the General Command of the Schools of Gen. S.A. Mario Ajmone Cat in the month of November, there was a new transformation and a different arrangement of the entire organizational - educational apparatus as follows:

General Command of the R.A. Schools - Rome - (V. Commander Gen. D .A. Attilio Matricardi); Command 3rd School Grouping - Naples – Gen. B.A. Orlando Ferroni;

Command 2nd School Grouping -Pesaro – Gen. B.A. Giuseppe Pomarici;

Command 1st Schools Grouping - Milan -Gen. D.A. Giuseppe Biffi.

The new subdivision kept proper account the presence in the areas of their respective competence of the three groupings of flight schools and specialists existing there, and acted earlier and more grip than the General Command which coordinated, arranged to improve and modify educational programs and material, it tended the recruitment, administrative personnel situation, applied the guidelines that we received from the Air Force General Staff.

The command structure resulted in this way:

1st Department - Lt. Col. Giovanni Sargenti (Flight Schools –Air Force Academy)

2nd Department -Lt. Col. Loth Bernardi (Specialist Schools)

3rd Department - Col. Virginio Rigolone (flying material/teaching)

4th Department - Col. Gino Felicetti (Schools Pre-aeronautical/gliding).

The command structure of groupings roughly modeled on the superior organization with the same departments and appeared divided in the following order:

3rd Schools grouping: Lt. Col. Luigi Dentex of Accadia – Chief of the flight schools Office. Lt. Col. Andrea Caporale - Chief of the Specialist Schools Office.

Lt. Col. Francis Falange - Chief of the Pre- aeronautical Schools Office.[500]

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2nd Schools Grouping: Lt. Col. Angelo Giannotti – Chief of the flight schools Office.
Lt. Col. Giuseppe Biccheri - Chief of the Specialist Schools Office.
Maj. Rodolfo Padovani - Chief of the Pre-aeronautical Schools Office.
1st Schools Grouping: Lt. Col. Paolo Mallorca - Chief of the flight schools Office.
Maj. Mario Silvagni - Chief of the Specialist Schools Office.
Maj. Federico Allocchio - Chief of the Pre- aeronautical Schools Office.
The individual groupings had jurisdiction over the following schools:
3rd Grouping - Flight schools. Air Force Academy (Capua) Grottaglie, Manduria, Aquino, Pontecagnano, Montecorvino Rovella, Foggia, Taranto.
Specialist Schools: Vibo Valentia, Capodichino, Capua.
2nd *Schools Grouping - Flight schools*: Falconara, Jesi, Foligno, Pescara, Frosinone, Orvieto, Fano, Grosseto, Castiglione del Lago, Arezzo, Siena, Pistoia, Perugia, Pavullo.
Specialist Schools: Ascoli Piceno, Bologna, Corridonia, Rome, Perugia, Orvieto, Rieti, Aquila.
R.A. Officers School Ciampino, R.A. Application School Florence.
Specialization schools: Littoria, Cerveteri, Tarquinia (Paratroopers).
1st Grouping: - flight schools: Portoroz, Puntisella, Ghedi, Cameri, Malpensa, Aviano.
Specialist schools: Udine, Cremona, Turin, Varese.
Specialization schools: Malpensa, Gorizia, Udine, Linate.
Sub-Division for Z.A.T .:
The 1st Area included the School of Malpensa.
The 2nd Z.A.T. had jurisdiction over the Schools of Portoroz, Fano, Falconara, Aviano, Rimini, Jesi, Puntisella, Gorizia, Ghedi.
The 3rd Z.A.T. controlled Foligno, Pistoia, Siena, Grosseto, Aquino, Frosinone, Castiglione, the 4th Pescara and Montecorvino Rovella.
The division of Flight Schools, included the following classification:

1st Period

Falconara (NCOs pilots): Commander - Lt. Col. Ettore Pasquinelli (later Lt. Col. Oreste Andrei);
Flight unit - Capt. Luigi Cesaretti (38 aircraft); flight material - Ba.25, Ba.28, Ro.41, Sa.200, Ca.164, FL.3, Ca. 100.
Grosseto (then in Manduria) (NCOs pilots): Commander - Lt. Col. Francesco De Grandi
Flight unit - Capt. Vittorio Falugi (19 aircraft) flight material - Ba.25, Ro.41, Ca.l00
Pescara (*Officer pilots*): Commander - Lt. Col. Ciro Aiello (later Lt. Col. Ettore Piccinini)
Flight unit - Capt. Vincenzo Craus (30 aircraft) flight material - Ba.25, Ba.28, CR.20, Ro.41, Sa.202, FL.3, Ca.l00
Frosinone (NCOs pilots): Commander - Lt. Col. Pasquale Robiglio
Flight unit -Capt. Giovanni Sartori (28 aircraft) flight material - Ba.25, Ro.41, Ca.100
Pistoia (ex Perugia) (Officer pilots): Commander - Lt. Col. Giuseppe De Zorzi (later Lt. Col. Francesco Marini)
Flight unit - Capt. Ippolito From Porto (34 aircraft) flight material - Ba.25, Ro.41
Siena (Officer pilots): Commander - Col. Americo Contini (later Col. Giuseppe Giraudo)
Flight unit - Capt. Donato Pinto (21 aircraft) flight material - Sa.200, Sa.202, FL.3
Orvieto (later abolished): Commander – Lt. Col. Ugo Grossi
Flight unit - Lt. Alberto Marino (24 aircraft) flight Material - BR.3, Ba.25, Ba.28, Ro.41, Ca.l00
Aquino (NCOs pilots): Commander - Lt. Col. Guido Rossi
Flight unit - Capt. Alfredo Russo (42 aircraft) flight material - Ba.25, Ro.41, Ca.l00
Fano (NCOs pilots): Commander - Lt. Col. Otello Basili (later Lt. Col. Alvaro Leonardi)
Flight unit - Capt. Athos Ghelardi (24 aircraft) flight material - Ba.25, Ro.41, Ca.l00
Montecorvino Rovella (NCOs pilots): Commander - Lt. Col. Cesare Di Carlo
Flight units - Capt. Aldo Boselli (28 aircraft) flight material - Ba.25, Ro.41, Sa.202, Ca.100
Portorose (Sea planes) (NCOs pilots): Commander - Lt. Col. Giuseppe Bordin (later Maj. Victor Costanzi)
Flight unit - Capt. Osvaldo Sarto (23 aircraft) flight material - S.59 Bis, Cant.18, Cant.25, Ba. 25, Ro.43, Ro.44
Perugia (later Pistoia): Commander - Col. Umberto Gelmetti
Flight unit - Capt. Ippolito Da Porto (26 aircraft) flight material - Ba.25, Ro.41[501]

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Pontecagnano: Commander - Lt. Col. Dionigi Lavatelli
Flight unit -Capt. Cesare Duzioni (26 aircraft) flight Material - Ba.25, Ro.41

2nd Period

Jesi (ex Cameri) BT: Commander - Col. Epifanio Dal Ponte (later Col. Italo Napoleon)
Flight unit - Capt. Francesco Wire (58 aircraft) flight material - SM.81, SM.79, Ca.310, Ca. 135 Cant.1007
Malpensa (BT): Commander - Col. Carlo Bartolini
Flight unit - Capt. Giovanni Goncini (68 aircraft) flight material - SM.81, SM.79, BR.20, Ca.135, Ca.310, Ca.164, FL.3
Castiglione del Lago (CT): Commander - Col. Achille Lorito (later Lt. Col. Ciro Aiello)
Flight unit - Capt. Alessandro Cerutti (100 aircraft) Flight material - CR.20, CR.30, CR.32, CR.42, G.50, MC.200, FN.305.
Grottaglie (BT): Commander - Col. Salvatore Ribella (later Col. Epifanio Del Ponte)
Flight unit - Capt. Carlo Ivaldi (48 aircraft) flight Material - Ba.25, Ro.41, Ca.310, SM.81, Ca.311
Puntisella (flying boats): Commander - Maj. Gino Aliboni (later Lt. Col. Filiberto Ardisson)
Flight unit - Capt. Emanuel Zammit (then Capt. Alfredo Russo) (38 aircraft) flight material -Ba.25, S.59Bis, S.55, Cant.501, Cant.506
Foligno (CT formerly BT): Commander - Col. Mario Bernrni
Flight unit - Capt. Domenico Battaglia (38 aircraft) flight material - CR.30, CR.32, CR.42, G.50, MC. 200
Ghedi (BT) Training: Commander - Col. Manlio Balestracci
Flight unit - Capt. Attilio Solimena (46 aircraft) flight material - SM.81, SM.79, Ca.135, Ca.310 Cant. 1007, BR.20
Cameri (1st period BT): Commander -Lt. Col. Francis Brach Papa
Flight unit - Capt. Antonio Lisanti (28 aircraft) flight material - Ba.25, Ba.28, CR.20, CR.Asso, Ro.41
Manduria (BT): Commander - Lt. Col. Emanuele Valenza
Flight unit - Capt. Matteo Ventimilia (46 aircraft) flight material - SM.81, SM.79, BR.20, Ca.310
Caserta (Capua): Commander - Col. Emilio Ermo
Director flight instructions – Lt. Col. Alvaro Leonardi
flight unit -Academy - (72 aircraft) flight Material - Ba.39, Ba.25, Ca.100, Ro.41, Ca. 101, Ca.133, Ca.310, IFN.305, Ca.164, .S, M.79, Sa.202

Note:
Were dissolved the flying schools in Gioia del Colle, Perugia, Alghero, Orvieto, Foggia, Arezzo, Taranto. Transfer the School of Perugia, Foggia, Taranto, Grosseto.
Transform Schools Cameri, Foligno, Grosseto. Established the Pontecagnano Schools, Pistoia, Siena, Cerveteri, Manduria.
The approximately 100 aircraft were used in links schools, teaching demonstrations, in-flight checks.

Schools of Specialization (Employees by their specialties)
Littoria (SVSV): Commander - Lt. Col. Giorgio Rossi (then. Maj. Giuseppe Donno)
Flight unit - Capt. Lucio Quacchia (42 aircraft) flight Material - SM.81, SM.79, BR.20, Ca.111, Ca.310.
Malpensa (SVSV): Commander - Col. Cesare Caccianotti (later Col. Virgilio Sala)
Flight unit – Lt.. Bartolomeo Scaraffia (68 aircraft) flight material - SM.81, SM.70, BR.20, Cant.1007, Ca.310, FN.305, Sa.202
Cameri (later Linate) (Sec. SVSV): Commander Lt. Col. Michele Banchio
Flight unit - Capt. Adriano Piva (26 aircraft) flight material - SM.79, SM.84, Ca.310, Cant.1007, FN.305, G.50, Sa.202
Gorizia (fighter) Training: Commander - Lt. Col. Edoardo Mulattiero (later Lt. Col. Bruno Brambilla)
Flight unit - Capt. Vittorio Pezze (110 aircraft) flight material - CR.30, CR.32, CR.42, G.50, MC. 200, MC.201, FN.305, Ca.164
Rimini (fighter) Training: Comandante Col. Alberto Canaveri
Flight unit - Capt. Cesare Befani (105 aircraft) flight material - CR.30, CR.32, CR.42, G.50, M.C. 200, FN.305, Ca.l64, .Sa.202
Aviano (Bomber): Commander - Col. Paolo Altan (later Col. Giuseppe Simonetti)[502]

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Capt. Bruno Mussolini in a photograph that depicts him as ensign of the 47th Stormo BT. (At his side Col. Scipione Tadè). The brave pilot was making the 274th Sqd. Long Range Bombardment.

Flight unit - Capt. Antonio Romeri (69 aircraft) flight material -SM.81, SM.79, BR.20, Ca.135, Cant.1007, Ca.310[503]

Foggia (later Aviano) Bombardment: Commander - Col. Paolo Altan

A Ro. 37 of Terrestrial Reconnaissance parked in the territory A small Balkan war cemetery stands for the sacrifice made in the previous operating cycle by Italian soldiers.

06/20/1941 -Mussolini accompanied from Gen. Pricolo inspects the flight school of Falconara. Arrives with its SM 81 (called "Tarlaruga") passes before an array of Ro. 41 - In 1941 the Duce carried out 14 hours of flight time as pilot.

08/07/1941 -The remains of the four-engine Piaggio P 108/B (MM. 22003) piloted by Capt. Bruno Mussolini crashed while landing near the airport of Pisa / S. Giusto during a test flight.

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Flight unit - Capt. Antonio Romeri

Udine (fighter): Commander -Lt. Col. Ciro Aiello (later Col. Michael Grandinetti)

Flight unit - Capt. Marco Larcher (105 aircraft) flight material - CR.30, CR.32, CR.42, G.50, MC. 200, FN.305, Ca.164

Arezzo (later Cerveteri): Terrestrial Aerial Observation Comandante: Lt. Col. Guglielmo Marchesi

flight unit - Maj. Vincenzo Strambì (24 aircraft) flight material - Ro.1, Ro.37, Ca.111, Ca.309, Ca.310, Ca.311

Cerveteri - O.A.T. (Terrestrial Aerial Observation): Comandante - Col. Celso Ranieri

Director of courses -Lt. Col. R. E. Guido Marcolin

flight unit - Maj. Ettore Zambaldi (38 aircraft) flight material - Ro.1, Ro.37, Ca. 100, Ca.101, Ca. 133, Ca.310, Ca.311

Taranto (later Orbetello) Maritime Aerial Observation (O.A.M.): Commander - Col. Giuseppe Marini (later Lt. Col. John Baldacci)

Flight unit - Capt. Oreste Sereta (24 aircraft) flight material - S.78, MC.99, Cant. 508, Ro.43, Cant.501/506, Ca.316

Tarquinia - Paratroopers School: Commander Col. Giuseppe Baudoin

Flight unit - Maj. Dante Salvetat (36 aircraft) flight Material - Ro.1 bis, Ca.164, Ca. 100, SM.81, Ca.133, SM.82

Pavullo unpowered flight school: Commander - Lt. Umberto Pezzali

Flight material -Ba.19, Ca. 100 - gliders of various types

Schools Specialists Capodichino (radio operators, Electricians, Radio-aerial-logistic): Commander - Lt. Col. Ernesto Mortillaro (later Col. Mario Armed)

Flight unit Sqd. Specialists - Capt. Massimo Marasco (14 aircraft) flight material - Ca.100, Ca.101, Ca.111, Ca.133, Ca.164, SM.81

Capua (photographers, pilots, engine builders, fitters, Armors): Commander - Col. Carlo Grillo

Flying unit Specialists Sqd. - Capt. Vincenzo Solomon (16 aircraft) flight material - Ca.100, Ca.101, Ca.133

Udine (motorists): Commander - Capt. Giovanni Monzardo

Ascoli Piceno (Electricians): Commander - Lt. Raoul Tardi

Bologna (assemblers): Commander - Capt. Giovanni Mastropasqua

Corridonia (motorists): Commander - Capt. Clemente Valente

Cremona (Radio Officers. Radio operators, Electricians): Commander - Lt. Col. Enrico Catanzaro

Perugia (motorists): Commander - Col. Giovanni Baldacci

Orvieto (Photographers, accounting assistants, Technical assistants, Health aides, administration): Commander - Lt. Col. Andrea Locarno (later Lt. Col. Pasquale Mento)

Aquila (Armieri): Commander - Capt. Achille Pucci

Roma / S. Michele - Comandante - Lt. Col. Cesare Fantoni (arms Sec. -Furbara)

Vibo Valentia (Electromechanical): Commander - Lt. Col. Giuseppe Mazzini (later Lt. Col. Caesar Bartoletti)

Rieti (Armieri, fitters, drivers, Motoscafisti. Bomb): Commander - Lt. Col. Aristide Bagatta

Cadet Officers School Complement -*Ciampino* - Col. Salvatore Ribella

R.A. Application School -*Firenze* - Gen. Arnaldo Pasquali (then in Gen. Ettore Lodi)

Sqd. of the School -flight material: FN.305, Sa. 202, Fiat G .8, SM.79

The material for the flight schools, 1st period had been qualitatively improved in 1941 with a massive influx of Saiman Sa.202, and AVIA - FL.3 and of course Ca.164, FN.305, Sa.200 and Ro.4l in normal production.

A detailed review on the flight material to be allocated to schools had been made on June 24, in a meeting attended by the Chief of Staff Gen. Pricolo, assisted by Gen. S.A. Mario Bernasconi and Giuseppe Santoro of the General Staff, with the heads of the General Command of the Schools - Gen. DA. Vittorio Giovine, Col. D'Aurelio and Maj. Gen. Giuseppe Gaeta. Secretary of the meeting Maj. Elio Albanesi.

The meeting began with the invitation of Gen. Pricolo to the Commander of the R.A. Schools exposing the situation of flight material and clarify whether the types of aircraft that came had proven technically suitable and sufficient in number to meet the need for training missions.

Gen. Giovine declared that the new aircraft assigned to the Schools: FL.3, Sa.200/Sa.202 for the 1st phase had given the maximum good results in the gradual replacement phase of Ba.25 used in their appraisal while for the 2nd phase of the preparation Ro.41 had continued to demonstrate excellent quality and very difficult was the task of the aircraft destined to succeed.[504]

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General Pricolo took note of the situation described but considered it appropriate for the purpose to prepare a report by the Technical Military Aeronautical Inspectorate on the characteristics found in the use of the aircraft, a problem which was delegated to General Bernasconi.

Col. D'Aurelio stated that the problem of education in the 1st period would have been fully resolved after the current selection of a new school aircraft being built as a prototype with interchangeable cockpit (Nardi Fn.305/315/316) intended to replace all other aircraft provided.

Gen. Pricolo - asked even if the number of school aircraft work could be sufficient for the immediate needs of the schools and Gen. Giovine replied that the number of existing aircraft added to those committed could be sufficient for every need.

Further possibilities to still use the Ba.25 and Ro.41 trainers, Gen. Giovine stated that -only 3 Schools on 9 of the 1st period they would continue to use these types of aircraft but only for the flight training phase, while the other would use Sa .200/202 and FL.3 and of course the Ro.41 mc. for the 2nd training phase.

About preparing pilots for seaplanes Col. D'Aurelio seeking to abolish the 1st period seaplane School of Portorose has demonstrated the students trained in terrestrial Schools 1st period, particular difficulties piloting once sent directly to Pola- Puntisella at the School 2nd period seaplane, whereas the shortage of seaplane for the 1st period.

Gen. Pricolo observed in this regard that the preparation of a good pilots of seaplanes not only required a great training for piloting but a positive addiction to sea with the different environmental conditions and practices, a certain predisposition for this type of pilot to be ascertained through a selectively on a voluntary basis in order to prevent the introduction of student pilots that is ill-suited to such specialties; also requested clarification of the proposed abolish the School of Portoroz, whether derived from seaplane aircraft deficiency for the 1st period or if it is motivated by the absence of objective difficulties at the seaplane school really represents, and then-which persisted both reasons, suggested the transformation of Portoroz in 2nd period by avoiding the construction of Ba.25 seaplane or even proposed to reproduce the old Cant.25, he proposed a careful selection among the students of the Schools of the 1st period to be allocated to the seaplane School of Pola- It really represents relying on volunteering and on attitudinal characteristics.

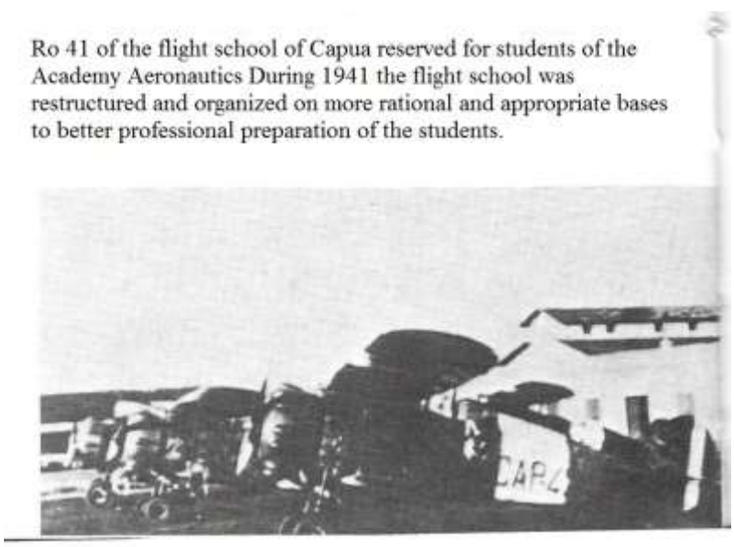
About the phase-out from the line of the Ba.25 it was approved the rule to strike off damaged airplanes where the repair cost would exceed 50% of the value of the aircraft, using also the construction details of the aircraft struck still susceptible of utilization (wings, trolleys, tail surfaces, engines, etc.).

The problem of the instrumental flight at the 1st period Schools recently adopted, found practical application with the installation on Sa.202 of a range of tools useful in such preparation excluding special and expensive equipment including the Sperry gyro reserved in a more advanced phase preparation at graduate schools.

Innovation instrument flight would involve a preparatory course for instructors at the SVSV and a 5-hour lessons for students of 1st period.

For the Fighter schools of the 2nd period Gen. Giovine called for the urgent allocation of between 205 and G.50 MC.200 of which OS .50 G/B dual control, to facilitate training to a wider mass of pupils with significant waiting times for teaching shifts and Gen. Pricolo of the unanimous opinion - Gen. Santoro about the production yield of such aircraft, gave a favorable opinion.

He found instead accepted the Col D'Aurelio proposal to increase to 100 copies ordered of the FN.315 (75 units) as transitional aircraft, considering sufficient and appropriate to this need the CR.32 yet available in large numbers; It was instead increased the number of hours of night flight training given the need to be able to have prepared pilots to be assigned to night fighters, by equipping fighter aircraft of normal assignment in place of the planned Ca.164, Ba.25 and Ro. 41 night trainers to be equipped ad hoc. [505]



Ro 41 of the flight school of Capua reserved for students of the Academy Aeronautics During 1941 the flight school was restructured and organized on more rational and appropriate bases to better professional preparation of the students.

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Gen. Pricolo stated that the completion of the training the night flight was to take place at the employment units, using aircraft equipped assigned as night fighters in level flight.

For the 2nd period BT schools. Gen. Giovine advancing the demand for 70 BR.20 and 50 SM.79, but this request was rejected by the need to replenish the units of the 1st line even if this decision involved a minor influx of students for BT Schools adequate to the possibilities of education of the schools themselves, on the availability of flight material supplied.

SRAM on the problem at schools, whereas these repair agencies had provided an average of excellent results in practical and economic terms, the proposal was accepted by Gen. Bruno to increase the potential of the teams, while Gen. Bernasconi in highlighting positive economic aspects proposed to increase SRAM for strength perhaps with personnel of minor repairs firms in difficulty, eliminating as much as possible reasons of business disruptions as feared by Gen. Bruno.

On aircraft production Gen. Bruno Director of the DGCA, exposed industry data that they had reached in the first half of a monthly index of 350 copies on average, while stressing that in the second half of the year would not have been possible to achieve these results, since the entry into production of the fighter Re.2001 Mc.202 and would not give the revenue expected because the insufficient production of DB.601 engines built only by Alfa Romeo to the extent of 50-60 copies monthly, Fiat being committed equipping production of DB. 605, and in consideration of the residual completion of production orders for aircraft school; the monthly production would not pass in the second half of a intake of 280 - 300 copies with a percentage reserved for school aircraft does not exceed 15%, reason why it was necessary to lay down provisions of daily waste of material for 1942.

For the production crisis that involved some small industries involved in the construction of school aircraft: AVIA-SAIMAN-SACA with FL.3, Sa.200/202 that will remain without work in 1942, Gen. Pricolo proposed absorbing it from part of the large potential companies that will outsource part of their production making them work as detached and decentralized branches of the parent company and in this sense, the Chief of Staff invited the DGCA to prepare a productive assimilation plan between large and small aircraft companies to be implemented with the utmost urgency. The precarious production conditions of AVIA company advised assigning a sealed commitment of 30 FL.3 pending the expected assimilation to a large company, while the SACA and SAIMAN in the best operating conditions, orders and repairs aircraft were assigned and production of special parts.

Maj. Albanesi signaled the presence in the central warehouses of a large amount of wings for Ro.41 and proposed the use of the material in storage to companies AVIS and Agusta engaged with orders of 70 Ro.41, despite the opinion that this proposal instead of Gen. Bruno was accepted by the Commission, with the commitment to order if necessary other fuselages for future waves committed to use all the materials in exuberance even in warehouses for several aircraft from Ro.41.

The session was concluded with the approval of the provisions.

At the end of 1941 the situation of flight material for the Schools of the 1st period of the R.A. It was as follows:

Ca.100	n. 237
	n. 14 (seaplane)
Total	n. 251
FN.315	n. 27
Ba.25	n. 392
	n. 36 (seaplane)
Total	n. 428
FL.3	n. 322
Ba.28	n. 14
Fiat G.8	n. 52
Ro.41	n. 451 (mc/bc)
FN.305	n. 175
Sa.200	n. 144
Sa.202	n. 283
Ca.164	n. 255
Total	n.2.402[506]

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Among the heterogeneous flight material supplied to the 1st period Schools (11 different models that the command tended to decrease and unify to create standard preparation methods, there were some aircraft that had created generations of aviators like Ca.100 , the Breda 25 and 28, and Imam Ro.41 which constituted over 50% of the available educational material, they had an age of work that went from 1928 to 1935 as the date of entry into service in the RA and could not theoretically be considered eligible in the most high extent, to those of preparation standards and better individual quality and performance that required a modern air force in the early 40s.

Other models went into production after 1935 and among these in particular the most modern FN.305 - monoplane with in-line engine - and the FN.315/316 derivatives; the versatile AVIA-FL.3 1938 also monoplane, biplane Cansa C.5 and the elegant PM.1 on which were based much hope of military technicians, who successor standard of Ba.25/28, and Ro.41 .

He had in mind to set in the near future the flight line for Schools 1st Period of three essential aircraft: the PM.l for the 1st phase, the FN.305 for the 2nd and FN.315 or SAI.7 for the improvement necessary to achieve the pilot's license.

Each of these aircraft had special flight characteristics that are completed and could be summed up thus:

	Hp power	max Speed	Weight kg	landing Space m.	Autonomy km
PM.1	60	180	630	134	600
FN.305	185	340	840	330	1,100
FN.315	200	320	1,040	270	800
Sai. 7	280	400	1,350	170	1,000

Compared to the airplane of the 1st phase, the speed was nearly doubled in that for the 2nd, the fivefold power, space landing doubled, the increased autonomy of 1/3, greatly expanded the instrumentation to increasingly challenging flights, gradually more difficult the successive stages of preparation. When compared to the generation of the school aircraft technical differences of the new models were more obvious and were well represented in the following picture:

	Power HP (60 to 280)	Max Speed (180 to 400)	Weight kg 630 to 1,350)	landing Space m (134 to 330)	Autonomy km (600 to 1,110)
Ca. 100	130	180	760	120	600
Ba.25	200	204	1,010	210	400
Ro.41	390	315	1,270	190	570
Sa.200	185	220	1,060	170	480

Note: In brackets, the minimum / maximum statistics of new-generation aircraft

With the new design drawings and a more streamlined shape had been able to get lower speed with higher power motors of 1/3, improve the independence, the overall performance, achieve a more rational performance of the whole machine and these were undoubtedly the signs the aeronautical and technological developments progress.

But these encouraging results opposed other elements of objective assessment deriving from economic reasons to build not less than 1,200 of the 2nd generation aircraft and the time required for equipping of the Schools, to justify and use the presence of a mass of at least 1,500 airplanes of the generation built between 1931-1941 .and still in production and which had to be properly taken into account because they are considered to still be valid reason for carrying out the educational tasks of the 1st period.

If there had been programming errors, this was attributable to those in charge of choosing the models for the Schools who had expanded the range to include more aircraft, apparently dissimilar in terms of manufacturing but in reality similar to each other in terms of performance and characteristics. [507]

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But it was too late to change the reality and it was necessary to take account of this presence whose most remote causes were sought in the great aeronautical development that had affected Italy in the early 30s and had prolonged, perhaps irrationally but undoubtedly in an unpredictable form, until the eve of the war.

In this irreversible reality was trying to change addresses and choices with the introduction of new and more appropriate formats, to coordinate policy and the commitment of aviation personnel training under the torment of war needs.

The activity of the R.U.N.A.

Also in 1941 the training squadrons of the RUNA gave their valuable contribution to the preparation of the crew, leading to the airplane pilot's license not less than 300 airmen and training about a thousand pilots in the 19 centers set up by the aero-aeronautical partnership.

The activity of the RUNA, essentially aimed to train the pilots of the reserve, it could not deliver and do not really provided throughout the course of the war, the wealth of general knowledge and specific that was required normally to a trained pilot, as a number flight hours - 30 to 50 per year - on board the vessels a the small single-engine courtesy of the RUNA (Fiat AS.1, Ca. 100, and Ba.15, Ro.5 bis in majority) could not overcome the shortcomings of the preparation professional for later fly war planes of greater commitment and difficulties in the flight guidance, excluding of course a more specific preparation for instrument flight, one night, flying with long range and training, fictitious or simulated emergency situations, radio assistance and other aspects that are normally required in preparing a good pilot of modern and optimal conception.

For the preparation of the specialists were students in 18 civilian schools activities at industrial technical institutes and courses pre-aeronautical in 68 schools between industrial and vocational schools that had selected about 4,000 students to be allocated to the various specialized courses for the R.A.

Also notable is the activity of GIL gliding schools they had selected 1,200 candidates and patented the certificate with 260 students, 136 patent B and 24 to that C.

The flight activities of the organization support of R.A. carried on through its RUNA and GIL, was taken to double the hours of flight of 1940 reaching 72,998 hours, including in this statistic also the activity of the specialty training schools.

The activities of the R.A. schools.

The recruitment of student pilots in 1941 (Officers and NCOs) had affected about 2,300 young people including in this number also those destined to the Air Force Academy.

The division of the divided territorially candidates was as follows:

	Northern Italy	*Central*	*Southern*	*Insular*	*Total*
Air Force Academy	289	190	159	69	707
the 1st period schools	362	129	84	57	632
the 2nd period schools	494	208	136	75	913
	1,145	527	379	201	2,252

Among the 33 students they were born abroad and 11 in Libya. The instructional programs had suffered some changes compared to 1940 and in particular for the 1st period of Schools included 60 hours of flight divided into 30 (1st phase) with Ba.25 aircraft, FL.3 and Saiman 200, and 30 (2nd stage) with planes Ro.41/Sa.202.

There were:

6 hours of dual control (takeoff, training, landing);

2 hours of individual control;

18 hours of single-lever (takeoff, training, landing);

4 hours of basic aerobatics control;[508]

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20 hours of single- control (takeoff, training, landing);
6 hours of dual control - (takeoff, training, landing);
4 hours of aerobatics (first elements - tailspin).

For the 2nd period Schools for Bombing the program included 84 hours of fractional flying in 21 hours (1st stage) with SM.81/Ca.310 aircraft and 1.4 hours with SM.79/BR.20 (Cant.1007 in alternative) while for the 2nd phase of military training were determined 49 hours with aircraft of the 1st line.

Fighters were scheduled 29 hours for the 1st phase, divided into 18 hours with FN.305, CR.30/CR.32 and 11 hours with CR.42. G .50 and MC.200. The 2nd phase of military training included 26 hours of flying with aircraft of the 1st line.

The Specialty Training Schools had to complete the preparation of pilots by carrying 50-hour flight to the BT divided as follows:

instrument flight, formation, flying blind, landing off the field 26 hours
fall of shot, launch 6 hours
Night flight, altitude 10 hours
full flight load in formation hours 8

For fighters were provided 30 hours training missions comprising:
formation flying, individual, collective 5 hours
Fighter/fighter in proportion 5 hours
real shots of fixed and moving target 4 hours
formation flying at various altitudes -12 hours
collective acrobatic training hours 4
Reconnaissance training missions 16 hours (1st phase) including:
takeoff, various altitudes, navigation for the 2nd phase (35 hours) divided as follows: formation flying, photography, instrument flight, flying blind, homing 18 hours
flights, navigation, shooting, throw of shot 7 hours
night flight 4 hours
flight at full load 4 hours

Altogether it was provided 130 hours of flight for training to bombing, 109 for reconnaissance and 104 for fighters.

The specialty training program while summarily considered complete in its essential points, could not specifically defined as satisfactory in some aspects of the war preparation, when you consider that the objective fighter specialties had been allocated only 4 hours for gunnery training on fixed targets and mobile hit with on-board weapons, an absolutely insignificant time to form a great fighter who had to defend themselves and attack relying on their own weapons and that for this specific task required a more prolonged training, better cared for, taught with the aid of modern control tools and special ammunition educational, perfected until obtaining of the optimum desirable; lacked in training standards of R.A., care of communications and radio links, vital in combat, lacked the encoded tactical doctrines and much was still accepted by the provisional and improvisation.

The same could be said about the preparation of the pilots of the bombers and reconnaissance.

The intake of pilots in 1941 was of 1,119 men sent to specialty schools and 1,043 of these were authorized and sent to units (76 were eliminated for accidents, incapacity, lack of specific attitudes).

The assignment was the following:
Marinavia n. 24
Esercitavia n. 164
Bombers n. 410
Fighters n. 397
Transport n. 48

AIR FORCE ACADEMY

In 1941 the regular courses of the Academy of Aeronautics of Caserta included the 3rd year for the "Turbine", 2nd the “Uranus”, 1st for the "Volcano", 13th/14th course integration NCO pilots (1st-2nd year) for promotion to 2nd Lieutenant pilot.

It began in the same year the Course "Zodiac" with 993 candidates who had seen the admission of only 298 students after a strict selection that had eliminated 3/5 of the participants.

In the summer of 1941 was eliminated from the Academy Course "Turbine" and the young lieutenants reached the graduate schools to complete their military training before being sent to the units.[509]

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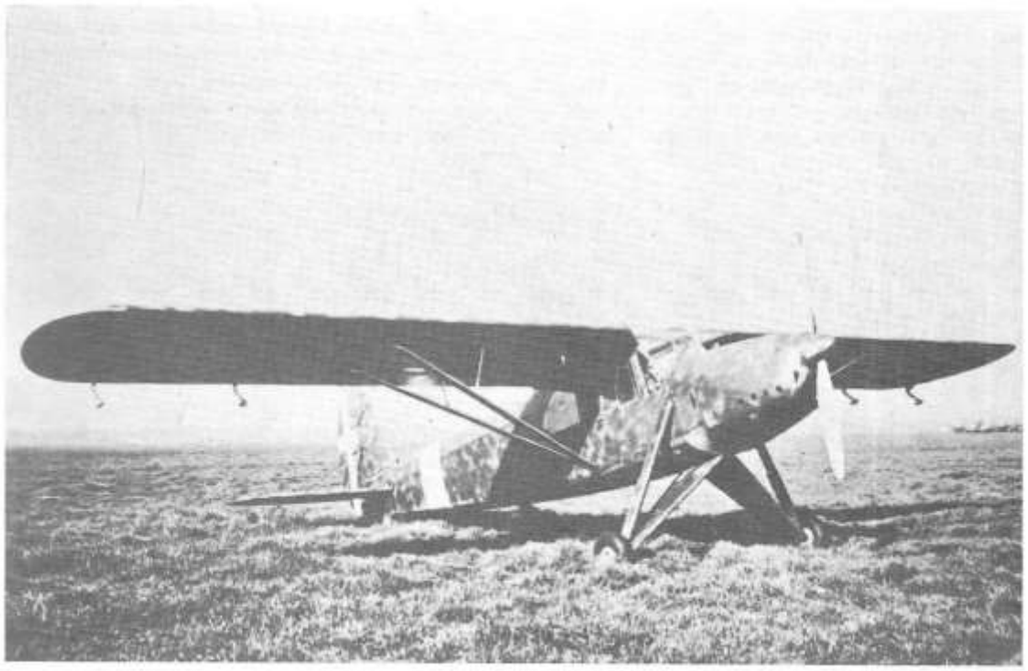
The degree of the pilotage imparted to students of pilots training could be considered more accurate and personal than that typically taught in other Pilot schools, but as the overall wealth of basic preparation of the average Italian military pilot was affected in part by an erroneous teaching approach common to all the schools, because it is based on the most flashy of the airplane in all its most egregious manifestations: pull-up, looping, roll, pointed at the ground, cork screw, on the professional pilot, rational, scientific, instrumental and average full airplane , aspect this treaty marginally and inadequately, if you think that in three years of schooling each student was flying for about 70 hours and that only 3 were dedicated to the simulated instrument flight. They fed alive hopes for more in-depth in the next phase of the training preparation addresses at graduate schools, but probably such a supposition accounted for those responsible for preparing a calculated basic mental reserves to substitute the insufficient educational elements provided by flight schools, well knowing that the higher-level education institutions, they could not vouch for the inadequate endowment teaching and the modest program of education courses, the minimum qualification for future war employment, specialization that would have been completed, it was thought and hoped at the employment units.

They were, as you may well argue, a series of misunderstandings and moral justification they could not compensate for any reason, inadequate preparation for any given level of student pilots: the pre-aeronautic Schools those of RUNA, from the military pilot schools including the Air Force Academy, to those of specialization, since the pilot - officer or NCO - arrived at units in line professionally and psychologically unprepared and could not be sure the squadron online the most suitable teaching tool for the completion and improvement of the crew, except to the traumatic experience of the first war mission that could decide, at the beginning of operational unit, the fate of a man taking due account of the statistics with the massive loss of young pilots, that confirm and validate the deficiencies of preparation.[510]

The IMAM Ro 63 as liaison/shooting observation went into service in 1941. It represent the national industry's response to an aircraft of the "Storch" class.



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It certainly was not valid and sufficient the only youthful enthusiasm, irrational but generous to fight, if all this was not comforted by the certainty of its human and professional skills ability to overcome all difficulties, to overcome all obstacles with the preparation, to deal firmly and reasoning every danger; but many young pilots at the time, among them also the writer, understood and sensed that it was necessary to integrate them with a professional background most complete war preparation, using optimal benefit in comparison with the enemy, the most efficient aircraft for speed, power and weaponry in opposition to those more and more valid and he feared that the enemy led into regularly in the fight, and thereby compensate for, other education gaps. The novelty of 1941 at the Academy of Caserta were the establishment of a pilot school to the command of a Colonel or Lieutenant Colonel of the role of guidance, the appointment of a senior officer as head of the flight with instructions to employ a office training and one for the flights; the appointment of another senior officer in charge of flight material and flight discipline, with a breakdown of the employee organizations in flight units (school sections, training section), technical and material department, personnel department.

Of such superior institutive directions, was then appointed commander of the Academy flying school Col. Erminio Ermo, director of flight instructions Lt. Col. Alvaro Leonardi, flight material department head, Lt. Col. Andrea Festa, flight department commander Capt. Pietro Bonacci.

Among the available material he was recorded assigning Ca.164, FN.305, Sa.202 and expulsion of CR.20/CR.30 and the planned elimination of Ca. 100 and Ba.39. It increased the allocation of multi-engine aircraft for training including Ca.101, Ca.310 and a SM.79 assigned to the commandant Gen. D.A. Augusto Bonola.

The strict selection drastically made on students aspiring, often irrational, morally depressing and subjective in the application of methods deemed suitable wrongly, reserved for a select few the Academy access even in exceptional period of the war, when more is needed pilots, many of which certainly fit among the excluded, if it were adopted and obtained with a different criterion selective recovery of students will certainly be used more profitably in other roles. The state of war imposed and demanded it.

The presence at the Academy of a large number of students of various regular courses led to a flight of division between the old field of Capua and the one in preparation of Grazzanise/Cancello, used as an alternate field. The flight activity and its education program did not undergo special changes and even the teaching materials remained substantially the same with the option for students to attend foreign language courses of their choice from English, French, German, Spanish. The study program still retained a high extent science is not always rationally useful in technical and professional training pilot officer in wartime and certain aspects were considered wasteful and unnecessarily challenging.

Activity of the flight school Pilot - Year 1941

	Air Force	*Terrestrial*		*Floatplanes*	
Month	*Academy*	*1st Period*	*2nd Period*	*1st Period*	*2nd Period*
January	25	1,352	1,989	123	519
February	18	1,892	2,828	229	530
March	467	5,883	6,254	185	653
April	1072	6,967	7,138	178	609
May	4,464	4,711	9,569	434	550
June	56	6,334	10,466	800	758
July	3374	9,588	10,188	852	685
August	4,238	7,825	9,596	513	749
September	3,993	5,488	7,731	313	151[511]

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October	2,119	1,558	3,460	99	427
November	403	989	2,920	65	262
December	257	2,265	3,031	42	425
Total	20,486	54,852	75,170	3,833	6,318

Total flight hours n. 160,659

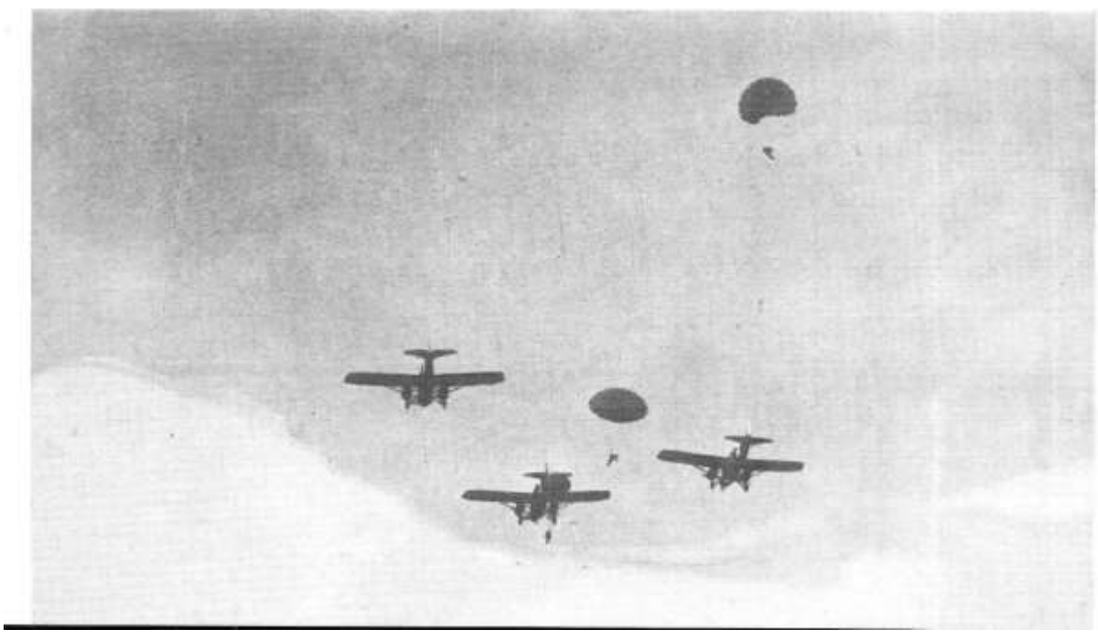
GROUPS ADDITIONAL TO THE R.A.

In the first half of 1941, exactly one year since the war began, the G.S. of the Air Force became convinced of the need to organize differently the instructional aspects and pre-operational, in reality found that pilots coming from the schools came to the line units or operation area, without possessing the required extent that necessary technical and operational preparedness for war and psychological use to deal quickly and in optimal conditions, the dangers of war flight, the encounter with the enemy, the practical ability to start and complete a military mission. That was missing in the pilot preparation, an intermediate stage that was not what elementary-school teaching or the operating-war unit.

Previously, and according to a custom for many years established in the unit, the rookie had just arrived at the unit was given over to an senior pilot (usually an experienced officer instructor) who roughed it out by teaching him some tricks of the trade, the result of personal experience, to then give to the squadron commander, gradually him inserted in a service routine with increasingly challenging assignments, up to the moment when it was judged subjectively ripe for war missions and assigned to military operations.

This system, which also began the youngest pilots to exhilarating atmosphere of specialties and spirit of the existing body still in the wings, undoubtedly had its validity to exist and moral importance, but presented in terms of the completion of certain individual aspects that burdened greatly the life of the unit, had to devote to the completion of valuable professional gaps elements, aircraft, time, which involved deficiencies in organic.[512]

Launch of paratroopers by a patrol of Ca 133 of the Tarquinia School in 1941 were made up of 6 parachute battalions, two regiments and smaller units of specialists.



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If it could go to have immediately available in the units, the pilots and crews prepared and suitable now to war flights, to receive adequate preparation, would made a great step forward in the organization and operational use, it would be, eliminated instructional methods that ranged from wing to wing (in some cases by group or even squadron), with criteria often do not belong to new forms of struggle, the more the result of personal experiences studied the use doctrines, encoded by standard methods. For certain specialties, such as fighters, there were serious fears in commanders to the constant dangers to any young pilot just assigned, if the vicissitudes of the combat had to face and solve individually, often without assistance led him to direct confrontation with the opponent without possessing the necessary experience of war. Existed, and it was useless to deny it, valid reasons for awarding old pilots to assist the younger and less experienced, which prevent squadron commanders or group, to be able to utilize fully the established staff to compose a training for a mission war, for hesitation due to lack of preparation that each element and assignment of experienced instructor pilots to take care of the professional assistance of the less experienced.

This situation, however, well known at the G.S. and particularly from the 3rd Department combat effectiveness training -directly responsible -was launched in solution by circular no. 5/5000 of 12 Aug. 1941 direct all commands G.U.A. in Italy and overseas to all unit commands up to the level of the squadron, the General Management and central offices of the Ministry, to Z.A.T. Commands, the Commands of the Marinavia and Esercitavia, circular which heralded the Complementary Groups of the constitution in the units.

The goals to be achieved with the establishment of G.C. were varied and were based on the following assumptions:

1) pre-operational training of crews.

2) Application of methods standard instructional

(Use the same flight material of the type assigned to the units in Z.O.).

3) Preparation of the staff at the War simulated flight in real conditions.

4) Retraining and upgrading of staff before returning to the allocation department (wounded, sick, injured etc.).

5) Continuing to maintain the level of departmental spirit and morale as a spiritual component of the employees.

6) The higher moral purpose and psychological deriving appropriate professional preparation and employment in the impact with the reality of war.[513]

Military ceremony at the Training School of the Royal Air Force of Florence. The entity, comparable to an institute of higher military studies, preparing officers of the GS for requirements f the aviation.

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7) Immediate availability of men and machines of organic replenishment at employment units.

8) Easy operation as a body of transition for the training of personnel to the passage of new types of aircraft and knowledge of new materials.

The introductory circular on the G.C. began with a premise due to the erroneous evaluation of a short war which instead had created notable problems in the rotation of personnel, aggravated also by the conviction that the intake from the schools and from the intake staff, would be shown enough to bridge the replenishment due to losses and alternations and provide trained elements to a good professional level. In fact the schools had provided a number of staff sufficient to result departmental needs and qualitatively not perfectly suitable for use, the Air Force reserve personnel arrived unprepared to units about the insufficient training received, modest number of flying hours, quality of training in terms of technical and professional completeness.

These negative experiences had greatly burdened the activities of the schools with additional burden of flying hours and need to change the educational preparation, with the result that recognize the importance and the presence of an intermediate body to fill the recorded gaps.

The problem was particularly warned by the units of the 1st line, that could not devote themselves to this additional task without being affected heavily the consequences of staff assigned to the unit, included the wear on the flight material, illogically diverted from its specific and precise application task.

The modalities of G.C. the wings foresaw the following:[514]

Staff of the Flight without visibility School of Malpensa during a service relationship before a training flight. Reconstituted in 1940 the SVSV was enlarged between the locations of Liltoria, Cameri and Malpensa.

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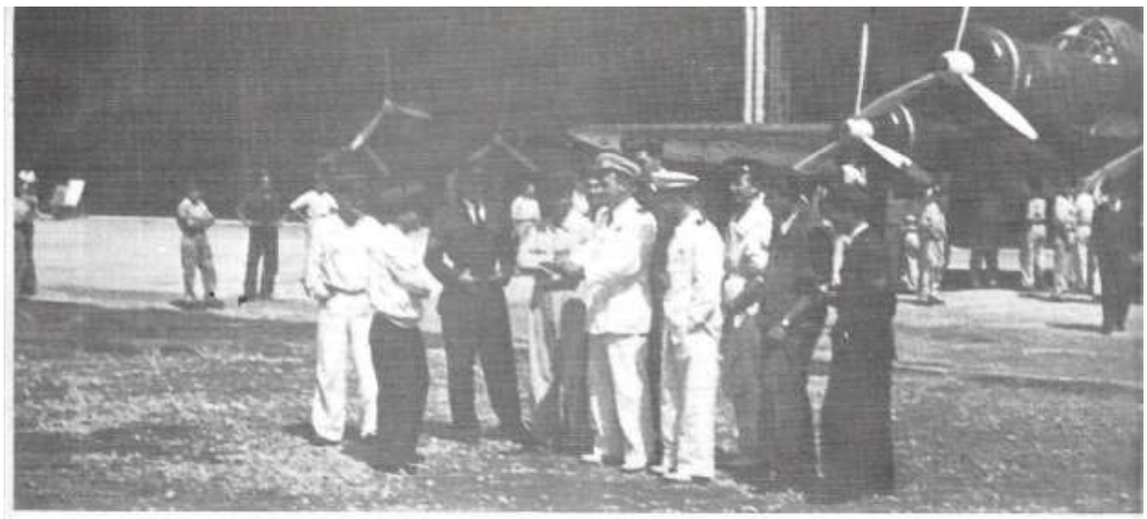

Aviano - bomber School. The institution was restructured in 1941 on a few, but efficient schools to allow for a more efficient preparation of the students on the multi-engines in 1st line service, SM 79, SM. 84, Cant, 1007, Bis, BR 20

Bombing

The best aspect of good efficiency and the basic sorting by a Stormo BT (2 Groups/4 squadrons/36 multi-engine) was recorded when the units could deploy in conditions "ready to use" 4 patrols of 5 units each, with 7 complete crews for the squadron and 2 spare aircraft. That is to say 20 planes in the 1st line 8 and in reserve. If this condition was reached in the Stormo, it should automatically proceed with the establishment of the G.C., having checked all the guarantees necessary for the implementation of what was established in the spirit of the circular 5/5000.

The G.C. of the Stormo had to be given to the top command officer attached to the command of flight planned in the law of war, being understood the command of the G.C. as the Group command to all effects.

G.C. were needed so the two squadron reserves with the most hours of flight equipment, 2 pilots for squadron suitable as instructors, 2 specialists for each class and all other staff in exuberance - pilot and specialists - in need of further training, results in excess of the estimated workforce of operational squadron (7 complete crews).

In its permanent home the Stormo will continue its normal military training of four squadrons of 7 units, while the G.C. continue the training of all other staff forming the Stormo operating reserve. "But when the Stormo reaches the deployment zone of war operations, the G.C. will remain at the permanent home with all the exuberant staff which will draw on each occasion the Stormo commander of the 1st line, to maintain in full organic efficiency of dependant unit (2 Groups/4 squadrons/20 multi-engine).

The command would Stormo assigned from time to time qualified staff for education and retraining on the most recent experiences of the war units, so that even the staff in training at the G.C. - Pilots and crews - could become aware of valuable items acquired in war, a reality that they would find in the units at the time of use.

The commander of the G.C. then had the responsibility to prepare the crews and to bind together until men obtaining a perfect cohesion of purpose and efficiency, running day and night training, and giving notice to command the wing of the degree of preparation by trained staff and the composition of the complete crews for use in war.

The headquarters of the G.C., if specifically equipped technically (SRAM) could also be used as a basis graving of the devices of the Stormo, as the park new or repaired aircraft assigned to the Stormo, as a service for the collection and the delivery of aircraft to the Stormo, as an institution under the personal acceptance tested by the hardships of war, in need of treatment and rest to be replaced with fresh elements to keep the flock to the maximum degree of technical and moral efficiency.[515]

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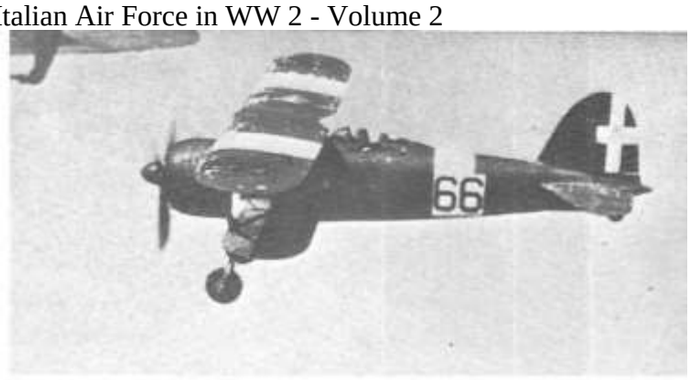

A CR. 42 of Assault School (N.A.As) of Ravenna in a Training flight. The school that had branch offices in Aviano and Ghedi, preparing the staff assigned to the assault of which waa discerned the urgent establishment of units. (Collection A. Vigna)

Another important and particular kind innovation with the creation of the G.C., concerned the fate of the injured or sick personnel was normally transferred administratively to DECEFARA (Central Depot Force Absent RA) staff that definitely was previously lost of strength from the Stormo of great detriment of the unity of the units, including the tradition of the Stormo and of the spirit of body and now with the new provisions of the GC, was instead assigned to an anonymous, impersonal entity like DECEFARA the Complementary Group of the Stormo who took care of the reports and the practice continuity and morale. When he finished disability, staff rather than being assigned by DECEFARA to any unit that it were necessary, fell through the G.C. the Stormo of origin, after taking in training along with their physical and volitional forces, the necessary professional and operational preparedness.

Fighters

The problem to ensure the training of fighter pilots resulted simplified of the need to prepare individual elements and not as complete crews for Bombers. In fact, the circular 5/5000 provided for the training of pilots in the permanent locations and under the responsibility of the Stormo commander; assuming in operations area of the transfer unit, the Stormo would have brought in tow all aircraft and personnel necessary for their operation, while the exuberant staff and with that still in training would be formed the G.C. the Stormo with the same terms as the one from BT. They would be assigned to G.C. for CT. aircraft exuberance of the Stormo, new or repaired assigned to the Stormo, the new model aircraft intended for the following specialties transition to the piloting of the new aircraft.

For CT units ordered not at the level of Stormo (autonomous groups and Sqd.) the staff of those units would be assigned to the nearest G.C. to Stormo CT. with respect to the place of deployment of the source unit, this headquarters that would be specified from time to time by the higher command, with the assignment of flight equipment required in excess of the increased training missions needs.

Torpedo planes/Dive bombers

The existing training missions organizations Specialties: 1st and 2nd N.O.S. of Gorizia and Capodichino and NATAT of Lonate Pozzolo, would be expanded and improved to better respond fully to the new requirement and in relation to the provisions of Circular no. 5/5000.

Overseas units

In units deployed in Z.O. of N.A., not being able to obvious reasons constitute the G.C. for serious technical and logistical difficulties inherent of the war, they had to be in their homeland G.C. at the permanent headquarters of the unit and with the circular constitutive mode. The results that were expected to achieve with this solution were the following:

1) Loss of the logistical problem;
2) High morale, staff for regular rotations;
3) Constant availability of fresh and efficient;
4) Possibility of increasing the duration -the stay in N.A.

The same way for the N.A. were established for the units in the Aegean, Albania.

As of 12 Aug. 1941 in accordance with the provisions of Circular 5/5000, the following Complementary Groups were formed:[516]

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A FN.305 assigned XI to the s.C. of Bombing at Bologna/Panigale Airport. Many instructional problems were solved with the establishment of Complementary Groups.

Bombing

36th Stormo BT – Bologna
9th Stormo BT - Viterbo (including the 176th Sqd. RST with Cant.1007 Bis)
46th Stormo BT – Pisa
35th Stormo BT – Brindisi
47th Stormo BT - Grottaglie (including 172nd Sqd. RST with Cant.1007 Bis)
38th Stormo BT – Tirana

Fighters

1st Stormo, CT - Udine
2nd Stormo CT - Caselle Torinese
4th Stormo CT – Gorizia
52nd Stormo CT - Ciampino south

As transitional measures until all the squadrons could have their own G.C. and allow the 1st line units to rely on the practical purposes of the G.C., additional provisions were issued to facilitate this eventuality for the following units:

14th Stormo BT - Reggio Emilia (all units located in Z.O. and Sqd. RST with aircraft type SM.79/BR.20) named: Collective Training Unit.

The two groups of the Stormo (44th-45th) would be armed respectively with SM.79/BR.20, and to facilitate the training of the following Stormo:

Group of SM.79 (8th Stormo BT -10th Stormo BT 174th -175th Sqd. RST)[517]

Capodichino - The Lt. Col. Vittorio Cannaviello commander the 2nd NAS of Naples. The Torpedo Bomber specialties was expanded as a training institution to cope with the growing operational needs.

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Group with BR.20 (13th Stormo BT - 43rd Stormo BT – 98th Group BT)

All Stormo, groups and squadrons involved, would send at the 14th Stormo all exuberant and training personnel, drawing from time to time for their personal needs trained and waiting to be inserted in the respective G.C. as soon as formed.

15th - 41st Stormo BT (in the process of transformation - from BT into different specialties)

7th Stormo BT (In phase of transformation of SM.84 would give the BR.20 to the 14th Stormo BT and Inspectorate Schools)[518]

Gorizia - A CR 32 equipping the fighter School of Merna.
In 1941 there was an increase of schools for fighter specialties - bring to three and a wider availability of trainer aircraft CR 43, G.50 and MC.200.

Fighter pilots in training with the G 50 - The Specialty Schools were increased in 1941, with over 200 specimens of trainer aircraft of whom come from the 1st line.

Training for acrobatic fighting at a fighter School of RA. Despite progress, the preparation of the fighter pilots had not reached in 1941 the quality standard advocated by GS/RA.

Pilots of a pending education fighter School with 50 G/B. As they began their studies in tandem to transform a Training the CR. 42, it was not technical possible to amend the Macchi trainer to also the MC, 200.

Accident at a Ca 310, of the G.C. Aerial Observation placed in Lucca / Tassignano The other specialties: O.A., RM., Transportation, Assault had their Complementary Group to meet all operational requirements.

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18th Stormo BT (in phase of transformation from BT into different specialties)
30th Stormo BT (in Z.O. - constitute the G.C. on the permanent home)
32nd Stormo BT (pending subsequent provisions)
39th Stormo BT/50th Group BT/41st Group Autonomous BT (in Z.O. -will head to G. C. of 36th Stormo BT)

Fighter

G.C. of the Stormo (54th Stormo CT/150th Group
Autonomous CT/3rd Group Independent CT)
G.C. 2nd Stormo CT (23rd Group Aut. CT/24th Group Aut. CT/155th Group Aut. (376th Sqd) GC of the 4th Stormo CT (20th Group Aut. CT/153rd Group Aut. CT/160th Group aut. CT)
G.C. 52nd Stormo of the CT (22nd Group Aut. CT/161st Group Aut. CT/12th Group Aut. CT/374th Sqd).

The following units would send exuberance personnel to train and G.C. assigned to them waiting to be their G.C. then:

2nd Group Aut. CT/18th Group Aut. CT/151st Group Aut. CT.

The C.N. - section. They should lie with the respective units of origin.

On 10 Sept. 1941 at the completion of the circular 5/5000 and 5/5001 which established and regulated the G.C., GS/RA issued Circular 5/5002 which specified the workforce of G.C. thus established:

Lt. Col (or Maj.)	n. 1
Officer inf. rn.	n. 2
Officer inf .rs.	n. 1
NCOs rn.	n. 2
NCOs rs. M.	n. 1
NCOs Cat. Gov.	n. 1
NCOs Ass. Cont.	n. 1
Troop rs/cat. Gov.	n. 8

A total of 4 officers including 3 in the role of guidance and one of the role services, 5 NCOs including 2 pilots, one radio operator specialist and two of Governance and Accounting, 8 specialists and airmen of the Governance category.

Ancillary Group was not ordered squadrons of the flight material was transferred from units which benefited the institution and the workforce is administered by the airport headquarters command of the G. C.[519]

Fighter pilots of a school head to their MC. 200 for a collective exercise. In 1941 it was formed the Fighter School of Rimini which was joined to those of Urline and Gorizia

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With this innovation heard and felt, the Italian Air Force greatly improved its instruction organization, eliminated certain dysfunctions previously recorded, maintained at an acceptable level a Training the personnel, lightened the specialty schools.

SPECIALTY INSTRUCTIONAL BODIES

Torpedo bombers

From the results that emerged in the first months of the war, as previously described, the high altitude bombing had caused many disappointments to the Air Force General Staff and to the many supporters of the attack method based on the aiming target - objective - trajectory as conceived and implemented in the Italian Air Force, with existing and not perfected systems and equipment, which proved to be below expectations in the light of the facts also due to the effects of the type and power of the bombs used.

The 31 bomber Stormi in altitude existing to date of June 10, 1940, obtained organically grouping the 123 existing squadrons of Italy, Albania, Libya and E.A., were reduced at the end of 1941 to 17 Stormi and a group for a total of 71 organic squadrons with a decrease of about 40% of the potential, due to dissolution of units for causes of war and operational transformations and variations of specialties. A Stormi, two autonomous groups and four independent squadrons had in the meantime established *ex novo* in torpedo bombers, and among these only a regular Stormi came from bombing in altitude, while on five groups of dive bombers on duty alone, two had been originated from existing dive bomber units.

Of 123 squadrons of bombers at high altitude operating at the beginning of the war, 66 were still in service in the specialty as of 31 Dec. 1941; the rest had been ground irreversibly from the war and had not been replaced or reconstituted in the ordering of the Air Army of 1941. Great progress had been made instead by torpedo bombers specialties that exist in June 1940, it was gradually developed, and established itself in the later months, perfecting its organization and structure, its teaching and doctrine of employment, its philosophy of war.[520]

Training shooting on Furbara test range. An old Ca 133 acts as a guinea pig to long burst of SAFAT visible on the ground. The average level of a fighter pilot in 1941 could not yet be considered satisfactory.

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The presence of the Central Torpedo Bomber Office at the GS/A directed by Col. Antonio Serra, was completed by other experienced officers including Maj. Sergio Crosara, Capt. Alfredo Franzini and Mario Lenti and for the part relating to collaboration with the Navy by Frigate Capt. Curzio Castagnacci, co-author with Capt. Lenti, of the teaching manual for the aeronautical torpedo pilot, a new specialty of the Air Force necessary to satisfy the new needs from a professional point of view. The NAS of Gorizia, entrusted to the capable command and professional experience of Lt. Col. Carlo Unia, was joined in 1941 by the 2nd NAS of Capodichino (Maj. Vittorio Cannaviello) thus expanding the teaching organization necessary to train new crews.

Such as teaching manuals were prepared publications on the problem of launching torpedoes and attack tactics directives for torpedo planes, needed to bridge the doctrinaire gaps for air torpedoing non-existent in Italian aviation, as notional and not rationally codified.

The task of the NAS was to experiment with new offensive weapons, perfect the attack technique, study the behavior and use of the torpedo aircraft, knowledge of the technical aspects inherent in the attack against a moving ship and the use of the equipment, evaluate the type of aircraft used and its possibilities, identification of the enemy vessel and knowledge of its characteristics: speed, armament, dislocation, armor and also escape maneuvers and defensive aspects of the aircraft in the event of fighter attacks.

The major innovation of 1941 was the creation of Complementary Groups. The 1st Av, engineer Rossi photographed on a SM, 79, IX Complementary Group (Photo C Falessi)

The new commander of the Schools of the R.A. Gen. S.A. Mario Ajmone Cat Delivery to the new students of the course "Zodiac" of the Aeronautics Academy of Caseria.

Still in 1941 the standard aircraft used by the torpedo bomber units was the SM.79, flanked in the second half of the year by the new SM.84 which represented a regression rather than an improvement of the SM.79, since although it was insignificantly faster and better armed than the « Sparviero » with the 4 SAFAT standardised on the 12.7 cal., it had less autonomy, difficulty in take-off and piloting as it was subject to easy yawing and continuous corrections in flight which were not at all appreciated by the pilots. The twin-engine Ca.313 in the torpedo bomber version had also been assigned and evaluated to the 1st NAS, but in this particular interpretation the Caproni aircraft did not offer all the necessary guarantees that were required of a torpedo bomber:[521]

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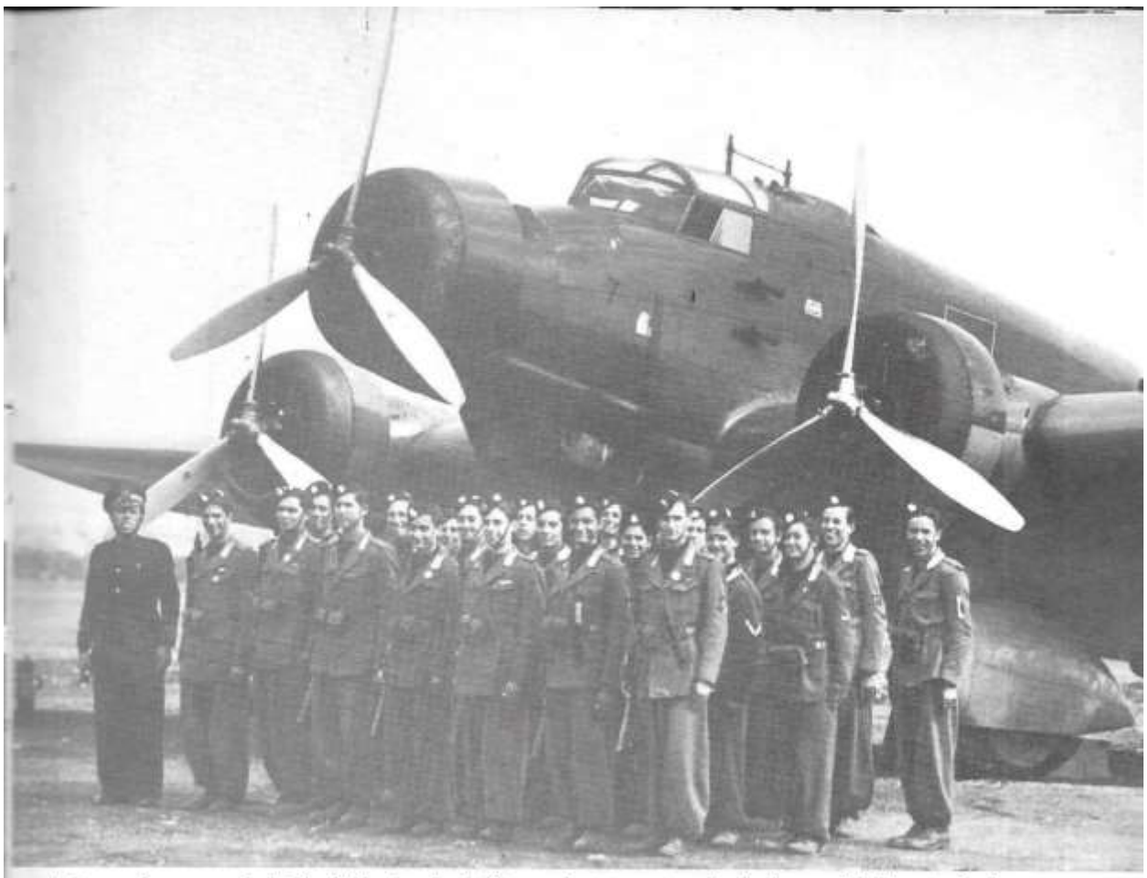

A platoon of pre-aeronautical of the GIL in educational visit to an airport are portrayed under the powerful silhouette of a three-engined SM 81. Remarkable was the Air Force propaganda among young people.

overload during take-off not compensated by a residual excess of engine power for any emergency, low speed, modest autonomy, difficulty flying in an atmosphere with turbulence, poor defensive armament, limitation to take-offs on fields without concrete runways due to the minimal distance of the torpedo's empennage from the ground (17 cm) which could be deformed or rendered unusable by jolts during take-off.

With all these limitations, the Ca.313/S, was used only for training with simulation of torpedoes.

There was so much choice in the limited range of the aircraft used for the torpedo bombers and we were forced to continue to employ them in the hope of being able to produce within a reasonable period of time of new prototypes and more positive hopes.

The launch technique had been improved with the adoption of new aiming sights, which, although not presenting any particular innovations, had nevertheless provided useful practical indications for the creation of a sight with an angle of the Biggio V6/41 type to replace the practical NAS graphometer designed by Lieutenant Colonel Unia and Lieutenant Commander Marazio, which functioned on simple concepts based on elementary settings: altitude, speed, target, release. For launch experiments, the ship «Alice» owned by the R.A. had been assigned to the 2nd NAS. Great progress had been made for torpedoes, in particular for the Whitehead of the Silurificio di Fiume (mod. 450) with a diameter of 450 mm, a length of 5,4,6 metres, a weight of approximately 900 kg with an explosive head of 170 kg of TNT, SCA model empennage of the detachable type made by DSSE.[522]

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It could be launched at a speed of 300 km/h, at altitudes between 40-120 m with a proper speed of 324 km/h reduced in water to 72 km/h (38 knots), with a pocket of about 10 meters. The explosion occurred by impact using two flintlocks.

The other torpedo made by the Italian Torpedo of Baia (Naples) had the same diameter and possessed explosive head of identical weight W.450/170 but it was slightly shorter (-21 cm) and lighter (-40 kg), speed slightly higher than water (40 knots), empennage stabilization, release a slightly lower altitude and the same was the percussion device and bursting with sharpening steels.

It was in an advanced stage of implementation a torpedo with magnetic fuse instead to impact, which would allow the maximum safety in the launch during the crossing of the magnetic field, and the subsequent explosion caused by the diversity of the magnetic flux encountered in the race.

In 1941 the torpedo bombers specialties was considerably strengthened by the decisive transformation of a first Stormo of terrestrial bombardment to new use technique. Between May and August the 36th Stormo BT (Col. Carlo Drago) carried out the transition with SM.84 and simultaneously sending the to the torpedo bombers training at the 1st NAS the 108th Group (Lt. Col. Luciano Bertaglia then Maj. Arduino Buri), to the 2nd NAS the 109th Group (Maj. Charles Gissoni then Maj. Mario Turba).[523]

Students of soaring pilots Aeronautical Institute of GIL. The youth organization oversaw numerous courses for pre-aeronautical specialists students, student pilot of gliders and courses for specialization on the fly without engine at Pavullo

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Caproni Ca. 100 of the Training Squadrons of RUNA - This auxiliary organization took place in 1941 a remarkable flight operations training pilots of the reserve and licensed many students.

The two groups were followed closely in their steps of preparation by the Chief of Staff Gen. Pricolo, which passed in July in the journal on the airport of Bologna Borgo Panigale the Stormo at whose command had been replaced in the meantime Col. Richard Helmuth Seidl who had replaced Col. Drago destined to the Aviation of the CSIR, and was he was replaced in the command of the X CAT, by Col. Sergio Lalatta.

The news of the transformation in torpedo bombers of the 36th Stormo issued early April, was appropriately valued, by Gen. Valle - former Chief of Staff of the R.A. -who addressed a letter dated April 5 to the Duce saying, to have the merit of the creation and development of the torpedo bomber units, asking at the end of his explanation to Mussolini, to be employed in such specialties.

Becoming aware of that letter, Gen. Pricolo sent on April 16, a "note to the Duce" Mussolini forwarded via the "Duce Private Secretary Dr. Osvaldo Sebastiani, which belied categorically observations of Gen. Valle knowing what it had cost in terms of unpreparedness lack of Italian torpedo bombers in the Air units, which he characterized as "the level of that of the Balkan countries", also desecrating the fable of "Stormi of sacrifice," which for years resisted stubbornly dies hard, and stated Mussolini that only with hard sacrifices and hard work had been possible to create out of nowhere the new specialties, to order the first torpedo aircraft, set up an education center to train crews, carry out the launch on 40 SM.79 installations and equip them of target pointers, ensure the preparation, of a good number of crews and sort with direct and precise agreements contracts with the Navy a significant number of torpedoes, also preparing the installation of the torpedoes on: [524]

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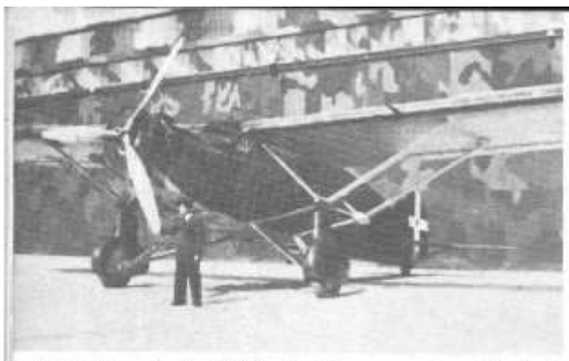

A Ca. 111 used by the O.A.T. school for group exercises. The school had supplied Ro. 37, Ca. 133, Ca. 111, Ca. 100 to fulfill a series of flight and educational uses. (Photo Lammoglia).

The Ro 41, the classic single-seater biplane / dual control versions which were prepared thousands of Italian Air Force pilots. He was joined in 1941 by Saiman 200/202 and by FN. 305/315

new aircraft SM.84 and Ca.313 and treating the solution of the problems and experiences designed to make the launch of torpedoes with great confidence (immersion depth, angle and aiming director), with the commissioning of the second study new types of torpedoes with electromagnetic sharpening steels for warships and merchant ships and a torpedo to be directed by radio guidance from above. General Pricolo ended his brief report highlighting the fact that the Italian Air Force finally possessed suitable aircraft and trained crews are able to exert this particular form of activity, which in his opinion did not require exceptional piloting skills, they dedicated men for sacrifice that do not aspire to special awards as proposed, but that in the short period from March 28 to April 2, had caused the sinking of war and merchant ships and damage to numerous ships among cruisers, aircraft carriers ships , cargo ships without suffering any loss (Dc.SPD n. 28386/ACS n. 030016/A).[525]

The Cerveteri airport home of OAT school (Esercitavia) which prepared Royal Army officers as observers and coordinated the collaboration between staff of R.A. and Army.

The new airport Aquinas home to a flying school and the 1st period. During 1941 it occurred several changes and changes in the Directorate General of schools to improve outcomes.

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In the period 15 Aug. 1940 – 31 Dec. 1941 the activity by torpedo bombers, with 11 organic squadrons invested in action in the Mediterranean from bases in Sicily, Sardinia, Libya and the Aegean was as follows:

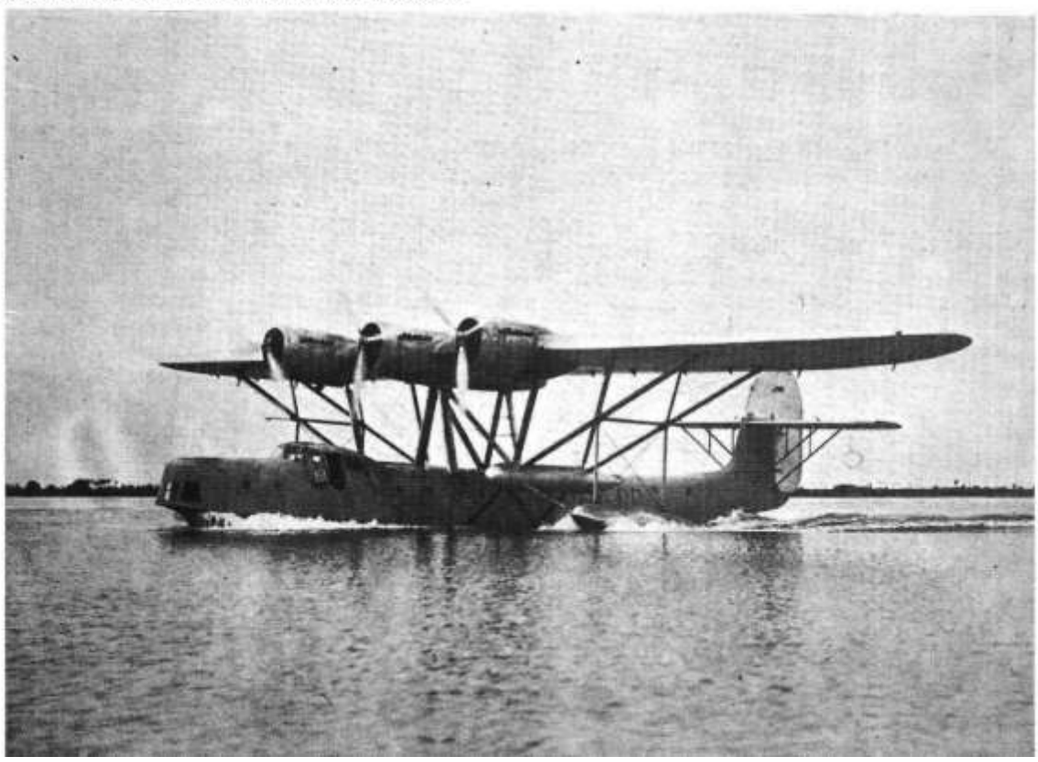
aircraft used	n. 350
flight hours	n. 1,540
torpedoes	n. 96
Aircraft equipped to torpedo bombers	n. 95
aircraft lost in action	n. 16

BOMBING

In January 1941 the situation the Bombardment specialties (land, sea and dive) it identified in its staff between units located in metropolitan areas including North Africa, Albania and the Aegean: 19 Stormi and 12 pilots of the Parachute School Tarquinia.[526]

Pilots of the Parachute School at Tarquinia. Thousands of student paratroopers flocked in 1941 to Tarquinia to attend certification courses under the responsibility of the Air Force.

The big three-engine Cant. 508 assigned to the OA.M School of Taranto (later transferred to Orbetello) used for training over long distances from the R.A staff and the RM observers.



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A sergeant specialist fitter rigger to wash. Significant boost was given to the recruitment of specialists students required to meet the growing aviation needs engaged in a bitter war.

Thousands of student paratroopers flocked in 1941 to Tarquinia to attend certification courses under the responsibility of the Air Force autonomous groups for a total of 104 squadrons among which 2 of dive bomber and 2 of torpedo bombers, squadrons equipped with the following flight material:

SM.79	n. 54
SM.81	n. 8
SM. 82	n. 2
Cant.1007	n. 10
BR.20	n. 20
Ju.87	n. 4
Cant.506/B	n. 6
Total	n. 104

At the end of the year the situation had changed in this respect: 16 bomber Stormi with 5 independent groups for 76 squadrons including an independent squadron and a long range bomber.

Two Stormi bombers of 2 groups each, and four independent groups for a total of 16 squadrons of which 3 autonomous; 1 Group diver bombers with 4 autonomous squadrons with a total of 6 squadrons, a total of 110 were squadrons that were equipped as follows:

SM.79	n. 46
SM.84	n. 10
SM.82	n. 1
Cant.1007	n. 20
BR.20	n. 16
Ju.87	n. 6
P.108/B	n. 1
Ca.313	n. 8
Total	n. 108

Had been dissolved or transformed Stormi 3 and 6 bomber groups (one Stormi in torpedo bombers, one in transport, one in Land bombardment), increased in the 6 squadrons of diver bombers with an increase of two compared to 1940 and bring to 16 those torpedo planes with an increase of 14 squadrons newly created; the long range bomber squadron with four engine Piaggio P.108/B who had almost entirely supplanted the SM.82 bombers, fighter squadrons-lightweight twin-engine bombers with Caproni Ca.313/RPB. Had disappeared units equipped with the SM.81, the Cant.506/B used in more congenial tasks such as transport and Maritime reconnaissance - rescue, replaced, by the advent in the line of the trimotore SM.84 used as a torpedo bomber-bomber. If the altitude bombing had provided great disappointments - its supporters between 1940-41 for lack of methods, equipment and instruments of equipment, the genius and inventiveness of Italian scholars had offset to start from 1941, is to integrate a more effective and revolutionary explosive device, the current system still in bombing methods in action with Italian aviation.

We refer particularly to the F.F.F. motor-bombs (Fiore, Filpa, Freri) as made jointly by three officers of the Air Force, the use of which streamlined, regulated with doctrines and widespread, could have provided during the extraordinary war results.[527]

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Unfortunately, in addition to the three inventors, and to a small group of technicians and of believers, the F.F.F. motor-bombs did not have the credit they deserve and it was used sporadically by the Royal Air Force and far more intensely by the Luftwaffe, certainly more skilled, forward-looking and confident of Italian makers, to the point of order over 2500 F.F.F. weapons between 1941 and 1943.

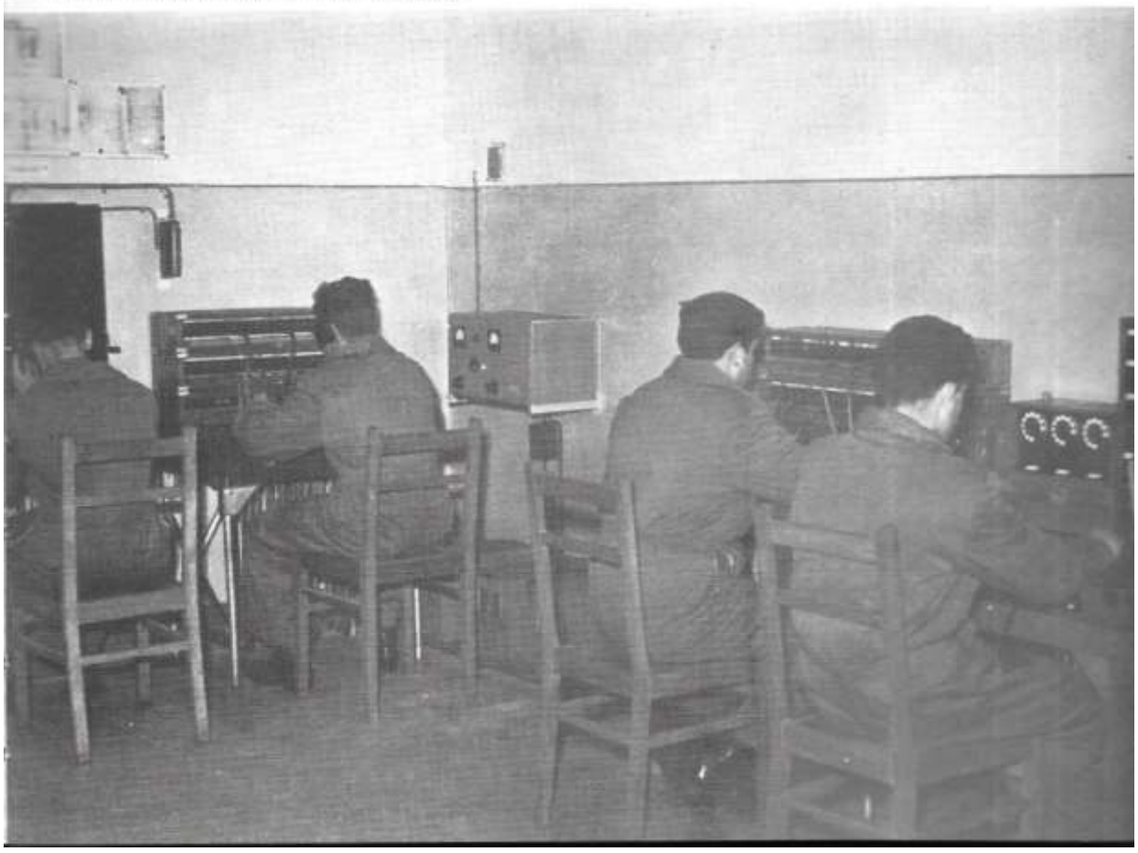
We wrote "revolutionary weapon" not without reason, because really the Mb/FFF was revolutionary and highly effective.

Structurally it consisted of a metal casing of 500 mm. in diameter, 1.40 m. long with the motor, with an explosive load of kg. 120 TNT mixed with exogenous and aluminum powder, and a total weight of 360 kg.

The Mb was equipped with a parachute to allow a slow and gradual descent and impact on the water without damaging the propulsion device, consisting of a 3.5 HP battery-powered electric motor that powered an external propeller. The speed of movement in water was 6 m/sec. (km/h 21.5) with an operating duration ranging from 15 to 30 minutes. Normal bombs launched from different altitudes (1500-5000 m.) against moving or anchored ships, if they did not hit the target, made a big hole in the water and everything ended there with a single shot, a single target, a single positive - or negative - result.

The Mb./FFF acted differently; launched by parachute between the 200/4000 m., and slowly descended to the contact with water the parachute is unhooked and the device is automatically put in motion with a predetermined spiral trending increasingly large, in a range between 500- 1500 m., exploding after striking anything it encountered in its rotation up to exhaustion, electric charge. [528]

Students telephone specialists in training at an Air Force school. In 1941 it was increased for the specialists pupils schools and industrial institutions for pre-aeronautical preparation.



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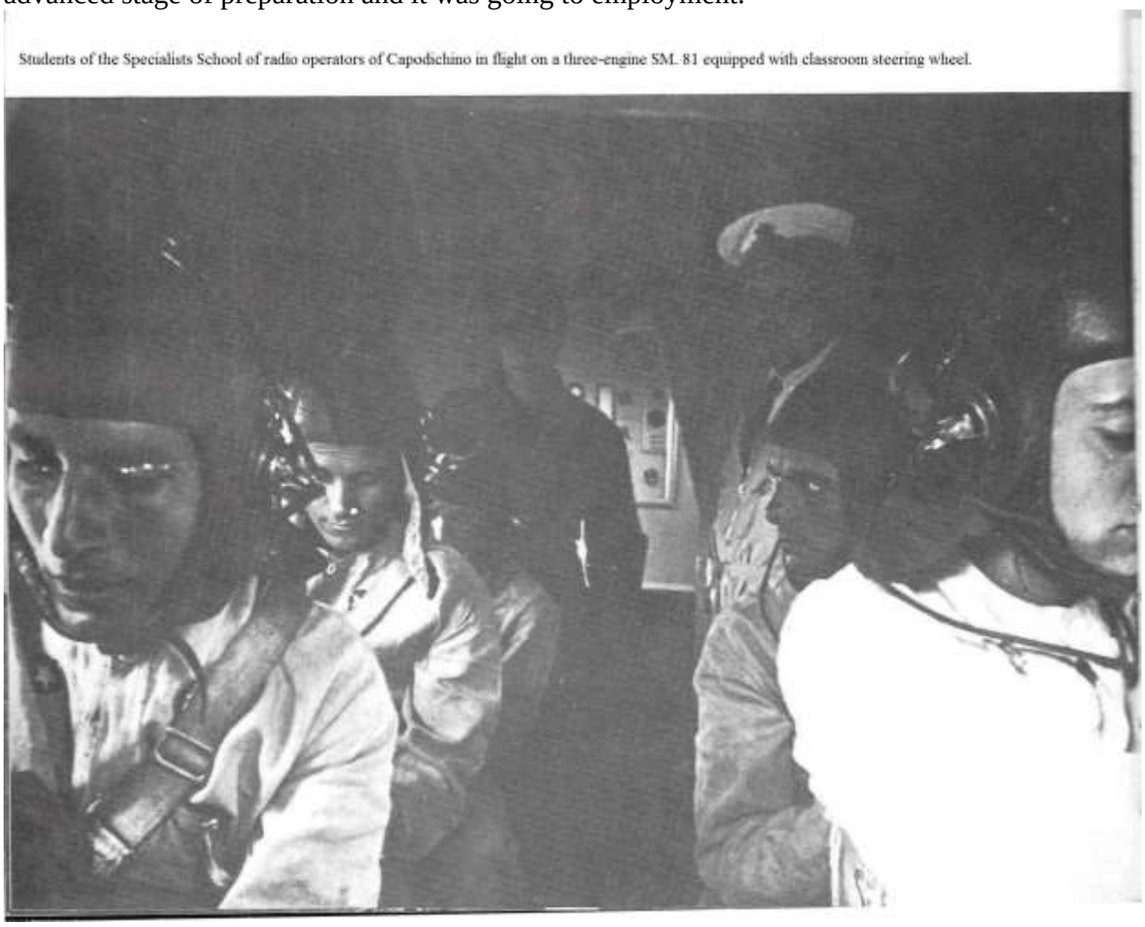
The first launches by the R.A. they took place in 1940 on Gibraltar, Alexandria with modest results (10 Mb. launched -1 steamer sunk -Damage to port facilities) too few Mb. in 3 missions could not produce specific results.

The three-engine SM.79 which was as always the backbone of bombing – torpedo bomber was provided in 1941 in about 160 specimens essentially went to the units of the 1st line, to schools, to the complementary groups.

A SM.79 was used for experiments in Guidonia radio-guidance due to an idea of Gen. Ferdinand Raffaelli, he thought of using a number of examples stricken due to near obsolescence, turning them into explosive carriers to throw on the big ships of the Mediterranean Fleet with the certainty of destroying them through a radio guide, remotely controlled. The team made for this experiment under the auspices of DSSE Guidonia, included for the radio-electric part Capt. GARI Emilio Montuschi of the Radio Div., Lt. Col. Mario De Bernardi for piloting systems, Eng. Mario Cerini for radio-pilot instrumentation.

It was to pilot with radio pulses from a guide plane, a SM.79 loaded with explosives to be directed to a specific ship moving target until impact. In 1941, the studies had come to an advanced stage of preparation and it was going to employment.[529]



Students of the Specialists School of radio operators of Capodichino in flight on a three-engine SM. 81 equipped with classroom steering wheel.

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Students paratroopers are about to embark on a Caproni Ca 133 of Tarquinia School. Commander of the Flight unit was Maj. Dante Salvetat. Were available about 30 three-engined Caproni.

There were Ca.135 stricken by the schools also not well suited to training and a lot of 36 twin-engine semi-new eliminated from aeronautical heritage and destined for demolition, were transferred to the Soc. Caproni, changed in version bis U (Hungary) and sold to Magyar aviation. Regulate the presence of the BR.20 from units, schools and complementary groups and the normal replenishment of lost machines with the introduction of about 140 new specimens of the FIAT bomber. The twin-engine FIAT BR.20/M, however, have long accused its old design obsolescence of over 5 years and Aeritalia had been studying a variant improved aesthetically and technically, enhanced with the new FIAT A.82 RC.42 engines 1250 HP, the most powerful A.80RC41 model of 1000 HP.

The presence of the CRDA tri-motor Cant.1007 Bis in 1941 resulted doubled from a year previously and aircraft though some constructive restrictions, collected the confidence of the aviators of the bombing and RST.

The most productive intake for the Bombing specialties included more than 250 units built in 1941 and represented the highest number of bombers delivered to the specialty until then, the models have long been in production.

Also notable is the presence of the new three-engine SM.84 delivered in about 150 copies during 1941, and assigned to bombers and torpedo planes units to complement and gradually replace the old, but still valid S, M.79.

The plane, however, soon disappointed in the hopes of those among commander, captains and crew were expecting the best overall performance, for a number of serious technical and design drawbacks: tendency to yaw to the right, little chance of directional correction due to insufficient command surface, high wing loading, discontinuous performance of the Piaggio P.XI engines subject to stall, tendency to trim variations with accentuation of the center of gravity towards the front.

The number is the initial incidents created on this aircraft unflattering comments by pilots and soon created an instinctive distrust to the point that the SIAI on the advice of the military engineers, began to, urgently make some changes for a new improved Bis version.

Other aircraft assigned in 1941 to the specialties Bombing was the twin-engine Caproni Ca.313 RPB (Reconnaissance Small Bombardment) that equipped two Stormi BT, 41st (Lt. Col. Ugo Rampelli) and 15th (Lt. Col. Raffaele Colacicchi), which for the occasion of employment they changed name becoming “on paper” Combat Stormi, although in reality not battle worthy to play this role for manifest impossibility operating the assigned aircraft.[530]

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From April to December 1941 the two Stormi absurdly engaged in commissioning tests at the point of the twin-engine and study of possible use, remained virtually unused and eventually had to give up the use of Ca.313 an aircraft not suitable for other war use. It was repeated in 1941 again, the mistake of assigning authority an aircraft to uncongenial employment, stubbornly repeating the mistake of the Ca.310 assault.

The long and laborious development of the twin-engine CRDA Cant.1018 continued in 1941, with an endless series of modifications aimed at improving the bomber; the four-engined long-range bomber Piaggio P.108, which had made its first flight in 1939, was handed over to the exhibits.

The big bomber had been destined to the newly established 274th Sqd. BGR (Bombardment Great Radius) formed June 10, 1941 in the airport of Pisa-S. Giusto under the command of Capt. Bruno Mussolini, he was also envisaged the establishment - the companion 275th that would complete the planned BGR Group.

He was assigned to the new unit also Lt. Col. Gori Castellani designated as commander, to take confidence with the four-engine and with the problems arising from its future use.

The flight crew assigned to the 274th came almost completely- from the 47th Stomo BT, was a veteran of the Greek campaign with considerable experience of war, had been qualified with flying courses with no visibility at the School of Littoria and the most modern air navigation methods instrumental.

In early July, they were delivered the first samples of the P.108/B which began flights pilots and specialists of the 274th Sqd.

On August 7, a four-engine piloted - by Capt. Mussolini, -MM.22003 -a following an incident that occurred to the hydraulic system while landing and the ensuing stalemate compounded by a fuel flooding that stifled the power of causing the engine’s arrest, he hit the ground with one wing hitting a farmhouse and breaking into three parts causing the death of pilots Capt. Bruno Mussolini and. Lt. Francesco Vitalini-Sacconi, the Sergeant motorist: Angelo Trezzini and injured 5 other crew members.

In command of the 274th Sqd. BGR renamed "Bruno Mussolini" was replacing Lt. Col Castellani and at the end of 1941, the unit could count on 4 P.108/B bombers which totaled around 140 hours a Training flight.

While the Regia Aeronautica was trying to create from scratch a modest but useful long-range bombing component, serious difficulties were beginning to arise for the dive bombing component following the failure of Germany to deliver the third batch of orders for the Ju.87 (50 examples of the R2 version) since the 100 Stukas Ju.87/B2 received between 1940-41 had been reduced to less than 60, of which only 44 were assigned to the 1st line units, 8 in storage as a reserve and the others assigned to the Dive Training Unit at Lonate Pozzolo.

Forty were lost for causes of war and accidents. It was looming thus a serious crisis for Dive Bomber units.

The activity of NATAT of Lonate Pozzolo at whose command was taken over by the Lt. Col. Angelo Savarino in place of Capt. Carlo Alberto Rizzi, was not very steady in 1941 for shortage of suitable training material. Besides a few Ju.87 were available CR.42, CR.32, CR.30, Ca.164, Ro.41, AP.1, definitely suited to other more congenial uses of assault, but certainly not suitable for a demanding training and serious as that required for the Stuka, with its strong structural stress and physically demanding of the pilots. The prospects of having other aircraft from Germany as well as an allocation of Jumo 211 engines reserve were all the more random, and the many times Goering himself interested in the issue, had excluded other deliveries throughout 1941 and part of 1942, being the production for almost entirely to the Luftwaffe. At this juncture the G.S. decided to intensify the Ba.201 tests to develop as a dive bomber aircraft from Breda Aeronautica and at the same time use by pilots of numerous twin-engine Ba.88 that despite being newly built had long been set aside for impossibility of war employment.

This was to change the Breda aircraft adapting it to the dive bomber and the subject were ongoing studies and experiments to obtain this result that therefore contained significant problems with implementation.[531]

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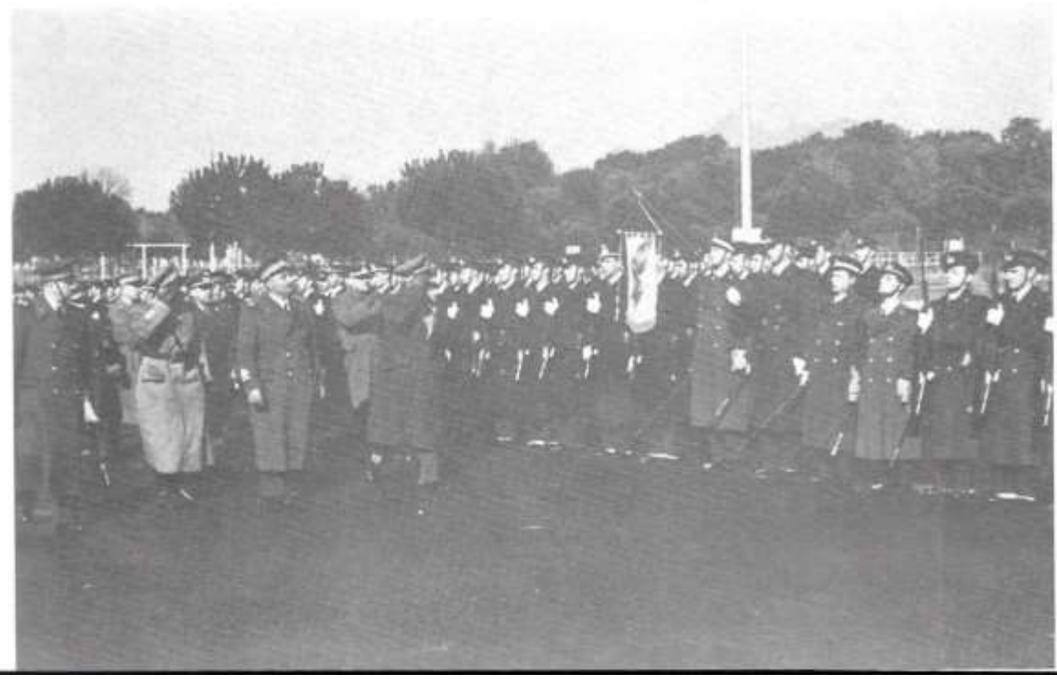
Capua Airport - Military Ceremony for students of the Air Force of Caserta. In 1941 he attended the courses for cadets in SPE youth courses "Uranus", "Volcano", "Zodiac". The "Turbine" had finished the three-year course in the same year.

Visit to Caserta Marshal Kvaternik accompanied by Academy Commander. Gen. Bonola. In 1941, the general command of the schools was given to Gen. C.A. Mario Ajmone Cat who replaced Gen. Giovine.



From this overall picture of the Bombardment Specialty it was evident that the situation was not the best due to the lack of suitable flight material, the technical inadequacy of that in service, and limitations of use for certain available types.

Proven difficulties that arose in the first 6 months of the war for the bombardment at high altitude, the downgrading of the SM.81 to less demanding tasks of the bombing, the flight instability and the modest payload of the SM. 79, the reduced rate of new bombers Cant.1007 placed into service in 1940 after a long period of adjustment, the obvious operational and technological decline in the BR.20 formed just as many reasons for concern for the GS/RA extended its overcoming the existing difficulties in the specialty and measures in place to overcome them.

The situation could not be considered objectively promising given the lack of suitable aircraft projects intended to replace the bombers in service and the decisions taken concerned the increase in production of the Cant.1007 in the Bis version (Piaggio P.XI Bis RC40 1000 HP), the maintenance of production of the SM. 79 which was under study, an improved Bis version with Alfa 128 engines, a limited further order for twin-engine BR.20/M after the ascertained impossibility of overcoming the considerable difficulties of putting the Cant.1018 into production on which hopes and possibilities which were perhaps excessively optimistic had been concentrated.

The only concrete alternative at the time was represented by the new SIAI-SM.84 trimotor (originally named SM.79 Bis) which had carried out its first test flight on the eve of the war on 5 June 1940 and on which the company had placed great hopes as the successor to the SM.79 and whose optimism had inevitably also infected the General Staff in contrast with the more cautious forecasts and perplexity demonstrated by the DGCA.

Once again the precariousness of the situation, the negative forecasts for the Bombardment Specialty, the pressing nature of war events and the need to guarantee the units a regular influx of airplanes, induced the GS to hasten the process by ordering a notable mass of SM.84s without further waiting for tests, trials, technical responses from the DGCA and the 1st CSA.

The result of this untimely decision was assigning committed to SIAI and to the AVSA for 250 pieces with an initial financial contribution of 200 million lire, which was followed by other orders of Bis improved version with a V-wings also equipped with the engines P.XIBIS RC40 1000 HP for over a hundred aircraft with an additional expense of another 125 million.

Entered in the units and in the order assigned to the 41st Group BT, 36th Stormo, 7th Stormo, 8th Stormo, 10th Stormo, the new three-engine soon proved to be a disappointment and it was just as promptly proposed for replacing the point that the reduced premature radiation the presence of the SIAI three-engine to only the 43rd Stormo that will keep them precariously in equipment until the time of the armistice.

The SM.84 immediately showed a worrying series of technical deficiencies which can be summarised as follows: identical speed to the SM. 79, lower practical ceiling, reduced autonomy, higher empty weight, higher maximum load, reduced war load. To the inferior technical characteristics of the SM.84 compared to the more reliable SM.79, we must also add a marked tendency to yaw to the right during take-off, high wing loading and objective difficulties in maintaining it with accentuated dangerous characteristics in the event of an engine failure, a phenomenon not infrequent in the P.XI, lack of regulation of the tail planes with a tendency to inertia phenomena and consequent instability, forward imbalance in the event of insufficient power during landing, difficulty in piloting and physical effort to a considerable extent compared to the more agile and maneuverable SM.79, excessive fuel consumption, widespread distrust among pilots and crews due to the numerous fatal accidents that occurred during the initial assignment to the departments, which the Chief of Staff himself was unable to eliminate, worried about the negative state of mind generated among the flight personnel.

The consequences of this rash decision were extremely serious.

The problem of replacing the flight material for the Bombardment Specialty was not solved, psychological conditions of open distrust for the new SIAI trimotor were created in the flight personnel, the operational capacity of the high altitude bombing departments and the torpedo bomber groups was significantly reduced to worrying levels, the same problems that had emerged in 1940 presented themselves in a more dramatic form since the Bombardment Specialty suffered a traumatic backlash, from which it never recovered throughout the conflict.[532]

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Lonate Pozzolo-Pilots in NATAT (Core Training Ground Target) in training. The school which had operated intensively in 1940 early in 1941, underwent a crisis due to the lack of Ju 87 in the operational units.

The new two-seater Saiman 202 entered service in 1941 in the large number of specimens for flight schools of the R. A. - soon became the prototype aircraft for primary education of student pilots.

A mass equal to 85% of the entire production of SM.84 was prematurely destined for demolition despite having a service age ranging between 8 months and a year and a half from leaving the SIAI and AUSA workshops. A small percentage necessarily remained in service limited to the 98th and 99th Groups which had 21 aircraft in charge of which only 8 were efficient at the date of the armistice. About 200 examples were awaiting demolition on the fields of northern Italy, a few other examples were assigned to the Bombardment Schools, an option for 50 bombers was advanced by the Slovakian Air Force with deliveries starting from 1943.

Between 1941 and the spring of 1943, the operation "SM.84" ended negatively, proving to be disastrous at every level and certainly one of the most emblematic in the history of the Royal Air Force between the years 1941-43.

It was thought to use the more available twin-engine Caproni 313-314 in the bombing line but considerable technical and structural modifications were necessary before the Caproni aircraft were considered suitable for the new specialty and the initiative 'fell into thin air.

It was also necessary to return to the old models by modifying the BR.20/M (Bis version) from scratch and making the performance of the Cant.Z 1007/Bis more regular by replacing the uncertain P.XIRC40 engines with the more regular 1175 HP P.XIX engines, encouraging studies to make the Cant.1018 producible in series with 1350 HP P.XIIRC35 engines and at the same time making contact with the Luftwaffe to arrive at a supply of Ju.88s necessary to bridge the old with the new production line.

The four-engined P.108/B, subjected to a considerable series of modifications of all kinds, had not yet passed the technical optimum and left the Piaggio workshops in a very small number of examples, such as to alter the forecasts regarding the constitution of at least one operational group with a long range of action, and for the entire period of the war it did not exceed 5/8 aircraft in charge of the 274th Sqd., of which approximately 50% were efficient and operating in 2/4 examples at a time and often individually; an employment that could not give more than modest results despite the great sacrifices offered by the personnel, with 10 aircraft lost due to enemy attacks and numerous fallen and missing among pilots and specialists.

A situation that would not improve at all until the armistice.

The renewal of the Bombardment line included the assignment of a contract for 100 BR.20 Bis equipped with FIAT A.82 engines, a contract from Breda for 100 Cant Z.1018s, and one for 50 Cant 1007 Bis to the CRDA with P.XI.Bis engines, including a series of 12 examples destined for the RST. For dive bombing, the SM/RA established the assignment of a possible production contract only after the evaluation tests of the Ba.201.

THE FIGHTER SPECIALTY

In 1941 there was an important turning point in the Italian Air Force's fighter specialty, because the disastrous trend that had been going on for 5 years was finally reversed, of the modestly powered radial-engine fighter aircraft being supplanted in production and operational policy by the more powerful, fast and powerful linear-engine fighter. The event was of fundamental importance as it marked the natural technological decline of a generation of aircraft desired and imposed and at the same time sanctioned the expected failure of a restrictive formula as it had been set up and implemented in the questionable philosophy of use by the Italian Air Force.

The types of radial CR.42, G.50 and MC.200 fighters, used on all fronts and at all latitudes, with temperatures scorching the Arctic at the same time, they had generally provided excellent robustness and climatic resistance but used specifically in the use of war and qualitatively in the opposing material, they had revealed in excess of the results analyzed in 1940, serious limitations at different levels, worrying morally debilitating for the specialty staff.

In EA the CR.42 had to face machines of superior power, in Libya the G.50 had found itself against the Curtiss P.40, on Malta the MC.200 had been opposed to the radar-assisted Hurricane and in Russia the open cockpit fighters had fought not only the enemy equipped with faster and better armed fighters, but also the "General Winter" that blocked the controls, engines, mechanisms, weapons and froze the limbs and faces of the pilots. The Fighter Specialty had equally undergone a notable qualitative transformation during 1941 without undergoing particular variations, since the 6 organic storms and the 13 autonomous groups with 3 independent squadrons detected at the beginning of the year, now resulted in 5 storms, 17 autonomous groups and 6 independent squadrons confirmed at the end of 1941 with a total of 87 squadrons out of the 88 pre-existing.[533]

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The flight material supplied to the CT squadrons in January was as follows:

CR.32	n. 13
CR.42	n. 27
G.50	n. 18
MC.200	n. 29
Ro.44	n. 1
Total	n. 88

at the end of 1941 the situation had changed in this respect:

CR.32	n. 2
CR.42	n. 21
G.50	n. 10
MC.200	n. 39
Mc.202	n. 12
Re.2000	n. 1
Re.2001	n. 1
Mixed: n. 1	(G.50, CR.32, F.5, CR.42, MC.200)
Total	n. 87

There had undoubtedly been a qualitative leap since the squadrons with the CR.32 and Ro.44 had almost completely disappeared, those with the CR.42 had decreased and the units equipped with the MC.200 had increased in number, which represented the most built aircraft of the year.

They had been established *ex novo* squadrons with Re.2000, Re.2001, Mc.202 who had greatly improved the situation of flight material. The new aircraft entered in the fighter specialty, the last representatives of the aircraft with radial engine, included the Re.2000 and Fabrizi F.5 of Caproni Vizzola who had equipped two squadrons: the 377th and 300th respectively assigned to the defense of Palermo and the one for Rome; two destroyers [Ro.57] destined for a fleeting appearance in the multifaceted Italian aviation scenario, built in small numbers, with the same time and modest operating results strengths and weaknesses in order to draw appropriate lessons and sufficient assessments altogether.

The two new aircraft assigned in 1941 to fighter specialties were the Re.2001 and Mc.202, both equipped with the Mercedes DB.601 engine with in-line cylinders of 1175 HP built under license by Alfa Romeo and in part purchased directly from Germany.

The Re.2001, extrapolated from the Re.2000, maintained numerous construction aspects of the previous Reggiane fighter including the wing and the empennage, had flown in July 1940 and had been started in series production about a year later during which, on 14 March, the OMIR test pilot Lt. Col. Piero Scapinelli di Le Guino, winner of the 1933 Bleriot trophy with the Macchi C.72 seaplane, had been killed in an accident due to a blocked propeller. A serious loss for the Italian Air Force.

The tests were continued by Commander Francesco Agello record holder for speed with MC.72 seaplane and at the end of thirty specimens were delivered to R.A. that it gave to the 2nd group CT (Sqd. 150th, 152nd, 358th) under the command of Lt. Col. Aldo Quarantotti, which completed training in December moved then to Sicily starting in 1942.

The speed of the aircraft was no more than 550 km/h, the armament had been improved compared to previous Italian fighter with the addition to the two synchronized arms of 12.7 mm. two wing guns of 7.7 mm., the theoretical tangent was approximately 12,000 m., with a slightly greater autonomy to 1,000 km., good maneuverability and above all a better comfort for the pilot with the closed cockpit constituted the most positive aspects of Reggiane aircraft.

Greatly appreciated and welcomed better resulted instead the Macchi C.202 fighter baptized "Folgore", that although they have the same engine, the Re.2001 however, had a top speed of 600 km/h, more than the Re.2001, identical tangency, -minor autonomy, extraordinary structural strength, excellent maneuverability, while maintaining the modest armament (the usual 2 SAFAT synchronized) of the Italian fighters.

The Mc.202 was the first linear motor fighter to come on line with the Italian aviation and represented the technological breakthrough the operational long-awaited by Italian pilots of the fighter specialties.

Already in the month of May of 1941 the first units of series were assigned to 1st Stormo CT (17th group), followed by the 4th Stormo CT (9th group) in July, to the 16th Groups(1st Stormo CT) in November.[534]

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Better prospects therefore arose for Italian fighters in 1942 since the Macchi C.202 had been ordered in large series and entrusted for production not only to Macchi, but also to Breda and SAI.

For the Heavy Fighter (combat, chase, attack) they had not made a lot of progress compared to 1940 as the twin-engine IMAM Ro.57 from the time improvement on preparation, had undergone a change in the version armament carrying mounted weapons in the fighter 2 SAFAT cal. 12.7 initials to 4 with the addition of 2 Mauser MG.151/20; also had suffered the installation of a ventral bomb rack for a bomb of up to 500 kg., all changes that had, however, altered and deteriorated the characteristics of the twin engine with a reduction in speed down from 516 km/h to 490, the difficulty of maneuverability in the takeoff and in the air, insufficient stability, tendency to front imbalances that required careful handling.

Its series production was decided only at the end of 1941. Another twin-engine fighter tested in 1941 was the SIAI-SM.89 which was the most armed aircraft of the Italian Air Force and certainly among the most powerful in the world with the 2 37/54 machine guns combined on the nose, the 3 SAFAT cal. 12.7 also placed on the bow and two other weapons placed on the back and in depressions. It flew at 440 km/h, with a range of 1600 km. It was still being evaluated at the end of 1941.

Another prototype tested in 1941 was the Caproni F.6, the first Italian aircraft equipped with a DB. 605/A1 engine, which was however inferior to the MC.202 equipped with an engine with considerably lower power. Better armed than the Macchi (4 x 12.7 mm guns) and lighter than the «Folgore», it had less aerodynamic penetration due to its greater frontal bulk and remained at the prototype stage.

The serious problem of finding a suitable assault in place of Ba.65, seemed to have found a solution in Re.2002, another Reggiane aircraft extrapolated from the Re.2000/2001, sent in 1941 to the 1st CSA Guidonia for assessments and initiated the production towards the end of the year. Equipped with radial Piaggio P.XIX engine of 1175 HP, was flying at 530 km/h, had four weapons (2 synchronized plus 2 wing) could carry 640 kg of bombs. It will be discussed further and in more detail in 1942/43, when it was awarded to the units.

Also in evaluation at Guildonia was the twin-engine Ca.331, born to another job in 1940 and refurbished in 1941 to start in heavy night fighter to solve the serious problem of night fighters still without adequate flight material. One copy was sent to Rechlin at the invitation of the technical service of the Luftwaffe. Another twin-engine being evaluated by the 1st CSA was the FIAT/CANSA FC.20 for the attack, but not yet configured exactly to its final destination of use.

Born as a reconnaissance plane had been modified for the attack on the bow with the installation of an Breda automatic cannon mod. 39 of 37/54 in antitank function.

Considerable technical and installation difficulties had emerged in putting in place and work in progress of experimentation they had been activated at the CANSA to eliminate drawbacks and defects.

But the most worrying aspect of aircraft design for fighter aircraft was the acceptance by the DGCA of SAI.107 prototype - a lightweight fighter -a completely wooden construction, presented by Soc. Ambrosini.

An event that caused this considerable apprehensions and grievances by many pilots and commanders of fighter units.

From the first prototype of the SAI.107 derived from the SAI.7 tourist aircraft, the SAI.207 was subsequently extrapolated, equipped with a more powerful engine and on this prototype aircraft the test pilot Mario Faccioli was killed in a test flight, while on the previous model 107 one of the most popular Italian aviators was killed on 18 July 1941 in a trivial accident: Commander Artuvo Ferrarin who fell on the Guidonia field during a test flight. Two other fatal accidents occurred with the SAI.207, further jeopardizing the future of the aircraft and increasing the distrust of the pilots. In addition to the improvements undergone by the flight material, there were also innovations in the field of instrumentation with the experimental installation of the first B.30 type transceiver equipment by the Allocchio Bacchini company which replaced the outdated A.R.4 receiver that only a few Italian fighters had in 1941. The B.30 model, which could not be considered optimal in terms of design and construction characteristics, nevertheless represented a significant step forward in equipping fighter aircraft with an effective communication tool.[535]

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The program for the allocation of flight material for the fighter specialty discussed in a meeting convened on June 25 by General Pricolo assisted by the Deputy Chief of Staff General Santoro, General S.A. Bernasconi and Generals GARI Bruno and Goeta, established a production of at least 60 monthly units of the new Re.2001 and Macchi C.202 fighters with DB.601 engines that would be supplied directly by Germany.

The lack of Mercedes engines had caused the cancellation of the Aeritalia order for the supply of 150 CR.42/DB.601 assigned in April, a cancellation that would have caused a work crisis but which would have been compensated with an order for 40 CR.42/40 G.50 Bis, despite the contrary opinion of General Pricolo who rightly pointed out the exuberance of such aircraft in the fighter line.

Gen. Bernasconi raised the possibility of assigning the construction of the new Re.2001/DB.605 fighter to Aeritalia instead with a suitable production order; Gen. Pricolo instead confirmed the assignment of the prototype to Reggiane and asked if the DB.605 could be mounted on the Re.2001 and MC.202 despite its greater weight compared to the DB.601; Gen. Bruno specified this possibility of installation with appropriate adaptations after modifying the MC.202 alone with a larger wing.

About the production of DB.605 at FIAT, this could only begin in the spring of 1942 if Germany had complied with the delivery of special equipment by the summer of 1941.

It was also canceled the order for Breda Re.2001 with the sale of the production equipment to Aeritalia in anticipation of building Re.2001/DB.605 aircraft. The Brelda would have received other orders for 50 Mc.202 and 150 MC.200, 50 MC.200 had been assigned to Macchi, and 30 to the SAI. For heavy fighter after sending the Ca.331 to Rechlin for assessments about a possible German order, the IMAM was solicited to deliver in the shortest time possible the modified Ro.57.

In 1941 also the assault specialties had the deserved attention, as the GS/RA agree with the General Command of the Schools, established the 1st nucleus of a Training Assault at Ravenna (then transferred to Lonate Pozzolo) led a 2nd nucleus in charge at Aviano at the technical logistics of the dissolved base 50th Assault Stormo, with a detachment in Ghedi (NAAS).

Were initially assigned to the NAAS heterogeneous aircraft such Ba.65 and AP.1, CR.32 and Ro.41, CR.42 the Ca.164 for training missions for the different phases that the preparation course required, but not had in the course year the desired aircraft to the assault as long expected.

Even sub-specialty Night Fighter was consensus and support in 1941 after much neglect and 1st N.A.I. (interceptors Training Nucleus) of Treviso established a separate nighttime employment section in Aviano, to prepare pilots assigned to that particular war activities (NAICN).

For training, the dive shooting was already in business since the 1940s, as mentioned, the NATAT (Dive Target Training unit) with the Lonate Pozzolo test range which used a series of aircraft including Ju.87, CR.32, CR .30, Ca.164, Ca. 100, Ro.41 and AP.1.

Torpedo planes as mentioned, could use the two NAS of Gorizia-Merna and Naples - Capodichino that used SM.79, Ca.313, Cant. 1015, Ca.164, FN.305.

All these institutions were dependent on the commands of their specialties and the General Command of the schools offered them the only co-educational for the compilation of texts and handouts for the organizational and theoretical preparation of graduate courses.

The attendance statistics of the fighters of the operating units during 1941 saw the following situation:

Fiat CR.42 (Total attendance n. 2682) highest index in August with 256 copies in units of the 1st line (excluding E.A. and C.N. squadrons).

Fiat G.50 (Total attendance n. 1885) index higher in July with 210 copies in units to the front lines.

Macchi C.200 (Total attendance n. 4581) index higher in May with 486 specimens present in the 1st line units.

The Macchi fighter had supplanted the numerical supremacy of CR.42 in 1940 with a higher index recorded in November with 314 specimens present in 57 squadrons.

* * *

During 1941, the following Military Valor awards had been granted to units of the Regia Aeronautica:

Silver medal to the flags of the Terrestrial Bombing Stormi 30th, 34th, 36th, 41st for the operating cycle performed in the Centeral Mediterranean between 11 June and 30 September 1940.[536]

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Silver medal for the operating cycle up to December 1940 in Egypt and Marmarnca, the flags of the BT Stormi 9th, 11th, 14th, 37th – to the flags of the CT Stormi 2nd, 4th, 53rd; the 50th Assault Stormo, the flags of the 73rd O.A. and 114th BT Groups

On 27 September the 36th Stormo BT (transformed at this time to torpedo planes) received for his flag a Gold Medal for Valor for the great sacrifices made by its crew in actions against the British fleet, which did not return the Wing Commander, three squadron commanders and numerous others.

A Silver Medal for Valor was also assigned to the 39th Stormo BT for the operating cycle carried out in the Aegean since the war began to December 1940 and a similar reward to the value was awarded to the 150th Group C.T. for military operations carried out in Albania between October and April 1941.

The Silver Medal for Military Valor was also awarded to the flags of the 154th and 160th Autonomous C.T. groups for the war operations carried out in Albania and Greece up to April 1941. [537]

CHAPTER TENTH
The activity of the air forces auxiliaries: Eservitavia/Marinavia

Esercitavia -The school paratroopers of Tarquinia - Maritime Recon - War activity.[538]

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CHAPTER TEN

The activity of the auxiliary air force Esercitavia/Marinavia

ESERCITAVIA (Army Air)

Compared to 1940 for the Royal Air Force, Army Aviation had not undergone significant changes since the establishment of 38 squadrons mobilized at the beginning of the conflict were reduced to 37 after the outbreak for military reasons the 110th Sqd. R.T. of E.A., was dissolved following the negative events of the war occurred in the territories of the Empire.

There was, however, a noticeable change in the of flight material as the venerable Ro.37 who had flown for the first time in 1934, was gradually replaced in the Aerial Observation units by the twin engine Ca.311 and the situation in 1941 is presented as follows:

Ro.37	n. 322 (6/10/40)	n. 188 (12/31/41)
Ca.311	n. 140	n. 272
Total	n. 362	n. 460

There was a decrease of n. 136 specimens for Ro.37 equal to about 40%, and an increase of 92% for the Ca.311 due to new production, while considering that 46 aircraft were lost to various causes.

On 30 October 1941, General Del Lupo, commander of Esercitavia, sent a report to the Army General Staff on the general situation of the Aviation for the Royal Army, on the location of the O.A. squadrons, which were distributed as follows:

6 in NA (O.A. Groups 15th, 67th, 69th) 19th Stormo O.A. (Col. Stefano Bonino)

3 in Russia (CSIR) 61st Group O.A. (Lt. Col. Giordano Chierighini then Lt. Col. Ragnelli Tito)

3 in Albania - 70th Group O.A. (Lt. Col. Cesare Mari - then Commander 2nd Army Aviation)

2 in Greece -72nd Group O.A. (Maj. Francesco Casarosa)

1 in Croatia – 5th Group O.A. (Lt. Col. Bruno Cerne)

22 Sqd. in the Mother Country divided between the G.U. of the Army and precisely:

XV Army Corp. -120th Sqd. - Albenga (20th Stormo O.A. Col. Mario Assennato)

Territorial Defence Milan – 12th and 136th Sqd. - Bresso (Maj. Frederick Allocchlo)

I Army Corp. -68th Group O.A. - Venaria Reale (24th and 33rd Sqd. Lt. Col. Antonio Celotto)

II Army Corp. -73rd Group O.A. -127th Sqd. Mondovi -137th Sqd. Novi Ligure

Territorial defense Bologna -1st Group O.A. (Lt. Col. Renzo Leverani) (27th Sqd. Jesi - 121st Sqd. Bologna)

XVII Army Corp. -62nd Group O.A. - (29th Sqd. Rome) (Maj. Giovanni Nicolò)[539]

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VII Army Corp. - 42nd Sqd. O.A. -Lucca Tassignano (Lt. Libero Ferrari)
XI Army Corp. -63rd Group O.A. -Vdine (Lt. Col. Ettore Zambaldi)
V Army Corp. - 71st Group O.A. -Gorizia (Lt. Col. A1essandro Serafini)
XIII Army Corp. – 65th Group O.A. (28th Sqd. - Cagliari, 124th Sqd. Aighero)
IX Army Corp. - 66th Group O.A. (87th Sqd. - Bari) (Lt. Col. Pierluigi Michel)
XXX Army Corp. – 131st Sqd. O.A. - Naples (Capt. Vezio Vernesi)
XII, Army Corp. -30th Sqd. O.A. - Palermo (Capt. Antonio Romeo)
XVI Army Corp. -76th Group O.A. - (40th Sqd. -Reggio Calabria -115th Sqd. Gerbinli) (Lt. Col. Giovanni Ignaccolo)

9 O.A. Squadrons for a total of 88 planes between Ro.37 the Ca.311, they were also engaged on tasks of Antisom surveillance in cooperation with Marinavia.

Overall the Air Force for the Army had available 321 aircraft (120 Ro.37/201 Ca.311) and 37 O.A. squadrons were appointed as follows: 24 of Ca.311 and 13 of Ro.37, efficiency was an average of 75% with a significantly higher percentage for Ro.37 than the more delicate and complex Ca.311.

The staff was training continually - improved - with new technical and more practical teaching materials effective teaching equipment, more intense application on the fly and professional activities in relation to the teachings of the war and the technological evolution of the conflict.

In 1941 the official Army aerial observers had conquered with their sacrifice many decorations for valor and three fallen officers in the line of duty had been decorated with M.O.v.m. for acts of valor committed.

Their names were those of Lieutenants Ugo Del Curto, Sante Patussi and 2nd Lt. Enrico Theodoli fallen in Libya, respectively, in the Mediterranean and Yugoslavia during risky reconnaissance missions.

Particular attention was reserved for the crews destined to North Africa with specific knowledge on guidance, - the instrument flight, searching particular, the identification of traces on the sandy slopes (cars, armored, tracked vehicles) recognition of friendly - enemies vehicles, marching troops (signaling towels - colored smoke) and exhausting patrol missions in desert areas or pre-gebeli were made to ensure that minimum of security to the rear infested with raids of the LRDG Commandos and SAS/RAF Rgt.

But the war industry where more manifested the presence and activity of aviation personnel for the Royal Army was the treacherous Balkan territory to start from July 1941 absorbed in ever increasing extent - men and means of the O.A. daily engaged in a subtle struggle between the partisan and Chetnik of the EPLJ, to safeguard the territorial organization established in the occupied areas, with constantly attacked and decimated garrisons, with the streets safe for sabotage, attacks, destruction, with garrisons isolated and without the need to survive they had to be fed with air drops of materials, food, medicine, ammunition, with the constant danger of enemy offenses in overflights at low altitude in the valley or the mountainous reliefs of Montenegro and Croatia, Herzegovina and Dalmatia, Slovenia and Bosnia.

It can be said that the Balkan front was reserved largely responsible for the Army to the Air Force because it initial units grew and mushroomed into smaller and increasingly expanding tasks and participation and through observation - institutionally planned - for strafing, bombing, air supply, airlift in tasks normally assigned to the Army Air units. In 1941 the Balkan front had absorbed the 63rd Group (Sqd. 41st/ 113th), the 5th (Sqd. 31st to 39th), the 70th (Sqd. 25th/ 114th) to the 72nd (Sqd. 42nd/120th) besides the 36th Sqd. Autonomous -with 72 aircraft (30 Ro.37 / 42 Ca.311) twenty different - aircraft including some multi-engine.

As commander of the 2nd Army Aviation for the Army, was appointed Colonel Cesare Mari.

In the field, specifically the preparation of personnel and training of the crews had made good progress both in the School of Aerial Terrestrial Observation of Cerveteri under the command of Col. Giovanni Coppi, assisted by the Deputy Commander Lt. Col. Guglielmo Marchlesi, both after the proclamation of the XII Complementary Group OA (Maj. Luigi Gobbi) located at Lucca-Tassignano with the task of maintaining a certain standard of professional training pilots and observers to be assigned to the operational divisions. [540]

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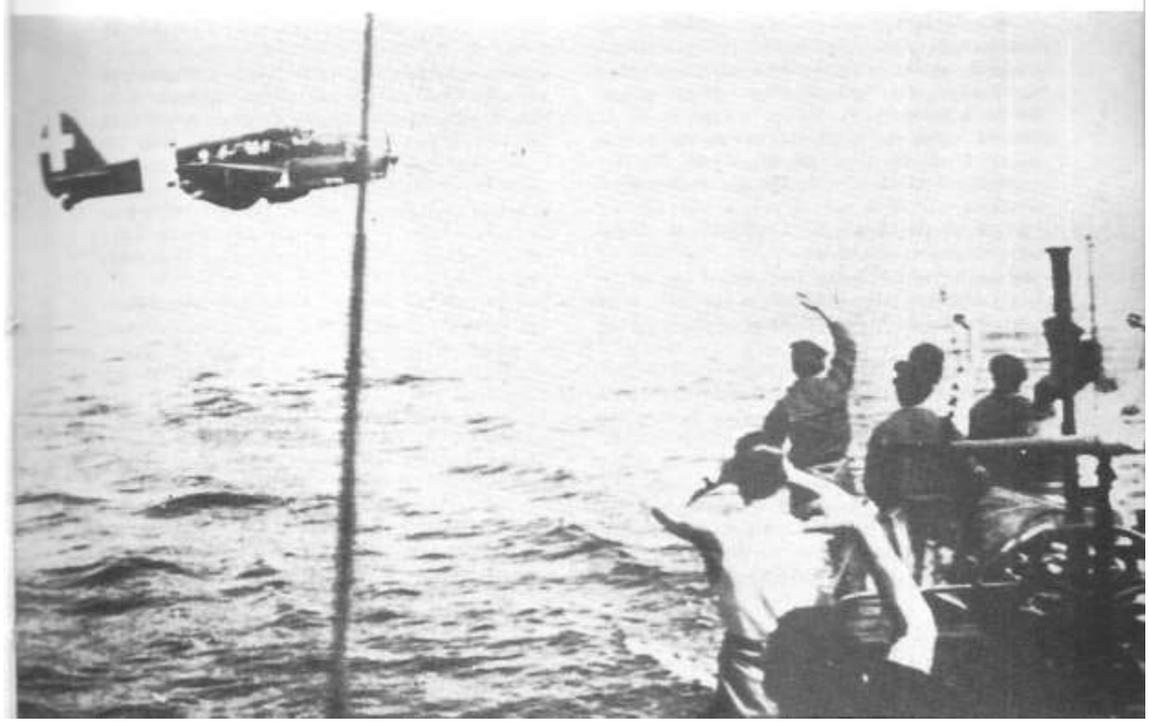
A tri-motor Flying Boat Cant 506 of the 287ª Sqd R.M. in war flight in the Mediterranean This excellent airplane made great merits to the strategic monitoring service for the surveillance of the Mediterranean Fleet.

A Caproni scout in escort service to a convoy in Libya is greeted by sailors during a passage at low altitude over the sea.



The equipment for the XII Group C included aircraft normal assignment to the squadrons O.A. and other still usable models or prototypes in assessment for future production assignments. During 1941 the School of O.A.T. He had graduated with the status of aerial observers 125 officers (38 lieutenants, 87 second lieutenants).

The main difficulties they had had for flight activity had proved inadequate for optimum preparation of observers, which was newly added extension of the tasks of the maritime observation due to the agreements that took place at the Supermarina-Superaereo level with the Army GS, for also extend to coastal surveillance and anti-submarine staff participation and the Esercitavia aircraft in missions that were to assist in part and where possible the Marinavia activities.

It was intensified preparation of radio communications with the apparatus type A. 350 board with RA.8 receiver operating at c/m waves, connected with RT station R.4 for terrestrial broadcasting on medium wave and reach up to 70 km., considered inadequate for power and outreach in communications between aircraft-RT station although it could pick up transmissions from greater distance without the chance to respond.

Still suitable for the purpose were panoramic cameras type OMI-Nistni, even if they were in discussions to acquire a number of German knapsack type Bertzin more responsive to the need for aerial observation service.

Special impetus was given to the aerial cooperation with artillery on defiladed goals from ground observation roll adjustment, detection of the control plane with instant communications aimed at reducing to a minimum the time needed, with the use of smoke projectiles initially (first salvo) and reports of subsequent corrections to batteries or battery groups. Communications between the command post and aircraft included a conventional phrasebook established as follows: ready battery - Ar, shot fired - LL/AR, 1st battery - 3K5, the 2nd battery - Y, 3rd battery -4K4, rise plus - 3S5, rise decreased - 5K1. Other signals to different sets of directions to the links between aircraft and troops -the use of signaling towels (white-red) and colored smoke. They were trying to improve the problem of communications between aircraft and troops by assigning radiotelephone equipment being tested.

The command structure for the Royal Army Air Force in 1941 he appeared in this way:

Commander Gen. B.A. Giulito Del Lupo - Vice Commander Col. Enea Tommaso - Secretary Capt. Muschetti and Lt. Cipolloni – Chief of the Operations Office. Lt. Col. R.E.. Giaointo Valente - Maj. Gino Pasquaretli -Lt. Col. R. E. Franco Figallo, Maj. R. E. Enrico Ciossa and Sergio Bossi, Capt. Cilpriani - incharge of flight material Capt. Cominotto - Maintenance - maintenance of equipment. Senior officers of R.E., assigned by the GS to the RA connection were the Lt. Col. Raffaele Travaglini and Italo Pirani.

By the command Esercitavia for the part technical - drop by the Army GS and for that tactic - training depended as mentioned earlier, the Parachute School.

PARACHUTIST SCHOOL OF TARQUINIA

To overcome at the end of 1940 all the difficulties that had blocked for months the activity of the Parachute School of the RA, at the beginning of 1941 after the adoption of the new IF.41/SP parachute changed from the previous IF.40 extrapolated in part by Salvator D.40, resumed with greater vigor and enthusiasm the work for the establishment of new units and tactical - drop assistance and a Training of three battalions previously prepared.

Among the officers designated by the Army GS to the Parachute School were Lt. Col. Cetta and Paroni, Maj. Verando author of tactical operational doctrine, the Captains Turrini, Appoggi, Priori, Caratti.

The Air Force assigned two officers of the CSA Capt. Doctors Mikalef and Polistena, then increased to 9, health working together with doctors of the R.E. Atella, Melandri, Gravina, Miotto, Leporace, Mancioli, Palmas, Marcozzi, Vergani, Papini, Veronese.

Airport commander was Col. Sergio Sostegni while the new Maj. pilot Dante Salvetat commanded the Flight School of the unit.[541]

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At the beginning of 1941 it was made up of the 4th Battalion. (Maj. Alberto Bechi Luserna) ordered 2500 IF.41/SP parachutes, 1600 Bordini air resupplyers with parachutes of 11 square meters and 600 aviation containers for weapons-materials with a parachute of 30 square meters, assigned to the school Ca.133 other until arrived the number of 33 three-engined strengthened by 2 Ca.111, 2 SM.81, 1 SM.82 and other single-engine aircraft to experience, connection and service.

The Studies and Experiences Unit of Lt. Col. Bettica preparing a new model of hand grenade, an anti-tank rocket launchers that greatly anticipated the advent of the American Bazooka and the German Panzerfaustlt, a air-droppable motorcycle in metal container called Volugrafo, parachutes for heavy loads and other useful equipment and innovations, including camouflage field caps for daytime launches and charcoal for night launches, a waterproof combination for camouflaged launch, bombs-magazine pouch corsets, jump helmets with double chinstrap greatly improving the individual and unit equipment, technical jump- training-operating also with creating a wonderful understanding and collaboration between the Army and Air Force, those moral values of such exceptional importance that would constitute the essence of the extraordinary *esprit de corps* always exists in the paratroopers.

In March 1941 it was made up of the 1st Paratroopers Regiment commanded by Col. Riccardo Bignami (Battalion. 2nd, 3rd, 4th), in April, a company of the 2nd Battalion. (Maj. Mario Zanninovich) occupied Kefalonia with Airborne assault action and then by landing the actions of Zakynthos and Ithaca; in the following months it was formed the 2nd Paratroopers Regiment (Col. Pietro Tantillo) with 5th Battalion (Maj. Giuseppe Izzo), 6th (Maj. Giovanni Taffiorelli), 7th (Lt. Col. Marescotti Ruspoli di Poggio Suasa) and afterward the first A/T companies of 47/32, sappers (miners, artisans and links), 81 mortars.

The Navy also constituted a special unit of paratroopers: the Swimmers-Parachute Battalion (T.V. (Lt.) observer Giulio Cesare Conti) of the. "S. Marco" Regiment intended for highly skilled jobs in amphibious operations.

The air drop activity reached significant levels with 500-600 launches, daily, the presence of paratroopers students in Tarquinia is carried on the military for 4000-5000 instructional cycles of 4-6 months, during which they were made six launches for obtaining the certification, tactical unit launches with fire maneuvers. It was expected to be increase the organic Corps Instructors to allow to take 140 elements at a more rapid pace in the preparation of the paratroopers, in anticipation of a first binary division and subsequently a second ternary G.U. with specialist units, services, and ancillary companies to form an Airborne Division Corps in conjunction with an air-transportable. An ambitious program led to the creation to the extent of 80%.

Greatly expand as organic was also the body of launch directors, which had to be brought to at least 300 enabled including 75 officer observers to paratroopers to be sent to Tarquinia soon would be aerial certification Observers from the O.A.T. School of Cerveteri.

During 1941 they occurred at school of Tarquini only three fatalities during training, two due to rupture of the snap hook (paratroopers Andrea Imperiali and Mario Brancaleone) and only one for the parachute failure and in which lost his life Serg. Bruno Peirani.

The percentage of fatal accidents compared with five months of 1940 was reduced by 50%.

In July, left the Tarquinia School for North Africa the 1st Parachute Carabinieri Battalion who was covered by glory in December during "Operation Crusader", with the defense of the junction of Lamluda and Eluet el Asel.

Incomprehensible and always remained shrouded in mystery particular, it was the finding occurred in Libya, which supplied the launch of a battalion with over 300 IF.41/SP parachutes - shipped by sea in the wake of the unit and set aside at the Village of "Luigi di Savoia", was it found almost completely unusable during a stock control, with torn covers that left to imagine the dire consequences that would have resulted in the hypothesis of a sudden the air landing of the unit.

All parachutes were later repaired and checked by the nuns of a religious institute of Tripoli, although the vicissitudes suffered by the battalion would not allow any use from the sky as it was in the aspirations and desire of Italian paratroopers.[542]

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The imprint left by the Air Force on the formation of Italian military parachuting was decisive and to this - excellent result obtained thanks to the merit of its men - from Col. Giuseppe Baudoin to the most modest parachute packer specialist - must be attributed the commitment and sacrifices lavished without respite during the four years in which the Royal Parachute School of the Italian Air Force in Tarquinia, the cradle of Italian parachuting, was born, lived, operated and disappeared.

The strict selection of the human material with elimination of 58.2% of the men who presented themselves - over 30,000 - it meant that candidates from the school came out the best elements of Italian youth on moral and volitional qualities, physical and psychological qualities that represented safe elements of success the moment of truth.

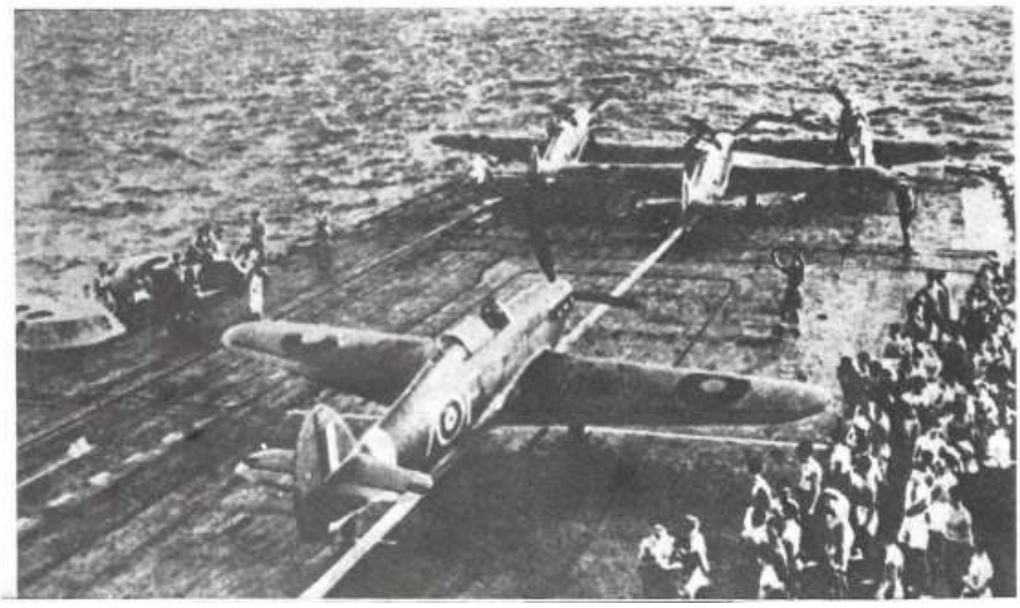
In the year 1941 accidental deaths for failure of the parachute to open were reduced by 100% compared to the fatalities occurred in the first 6 months of 1940. And what was undoubtedly a great achievement.

The folders were increased to 140 with another hundred or so folding tables, the teaching and gymnastic equipment was increased to meet the increased needs of the School which, after having lost long months of forced inactivity, was quickly recovering the lost time under the vigorous impulse given by the command of the Auxiliary Aviation for the Army, by the General Staff of the Army, by the General Staff of the Air Force, all bodies which in one way or another pressed Col. Baudoin to prepare other paratroopers, other units, to make new battalions and regiments ready for use.

MARITIME RECONNAISSANCE

The formal and service relations between Superaereo and Supermarina had become considerably clearer in 1941, with the solution in favour of the Air Force of the long-standing problem of competence of the torpedo bombers which had caused so much damage in the preparation and setting up of the new Speciality, finally and logically assigned to the institutional tasks of the Air Force thanks to the personal commitment of General Pricolo.[543]

"Hurricane" Fighter launch destined to Malta from the CV "Ark Royal" on Gibraltar-Malta route. On 13 November 1941, the Ark Royal was torpedoed and sunk by the U81- Lt. Guggemberger returning from a mission to strengthen RA.F./Malta.



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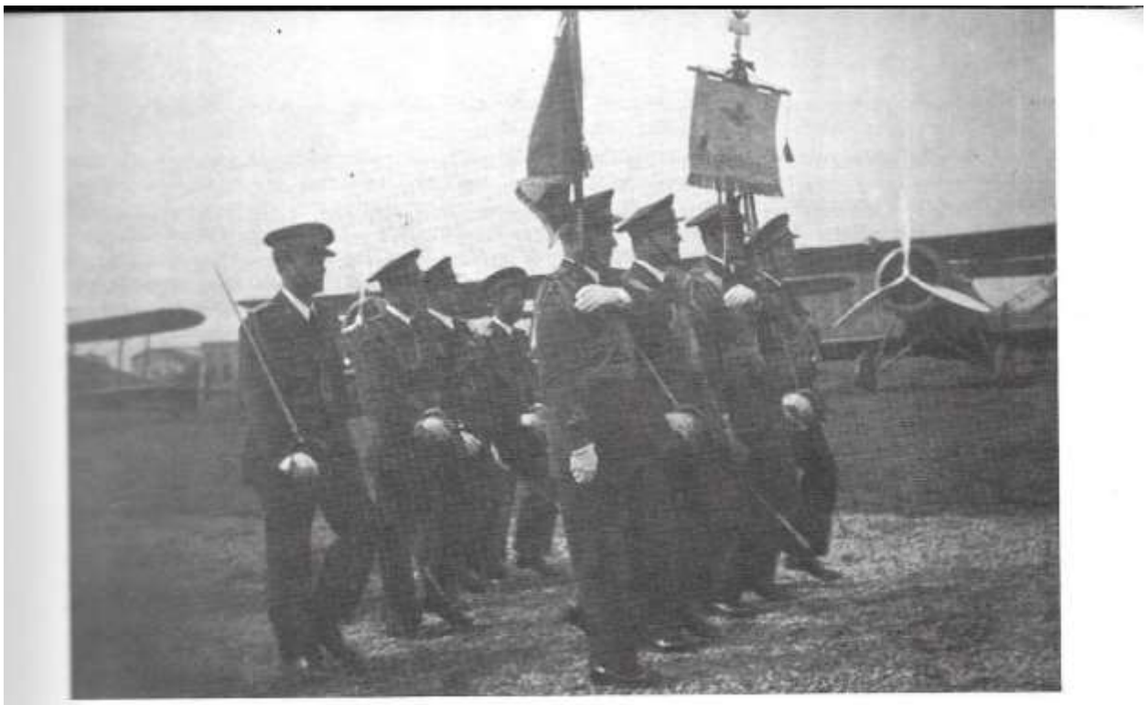
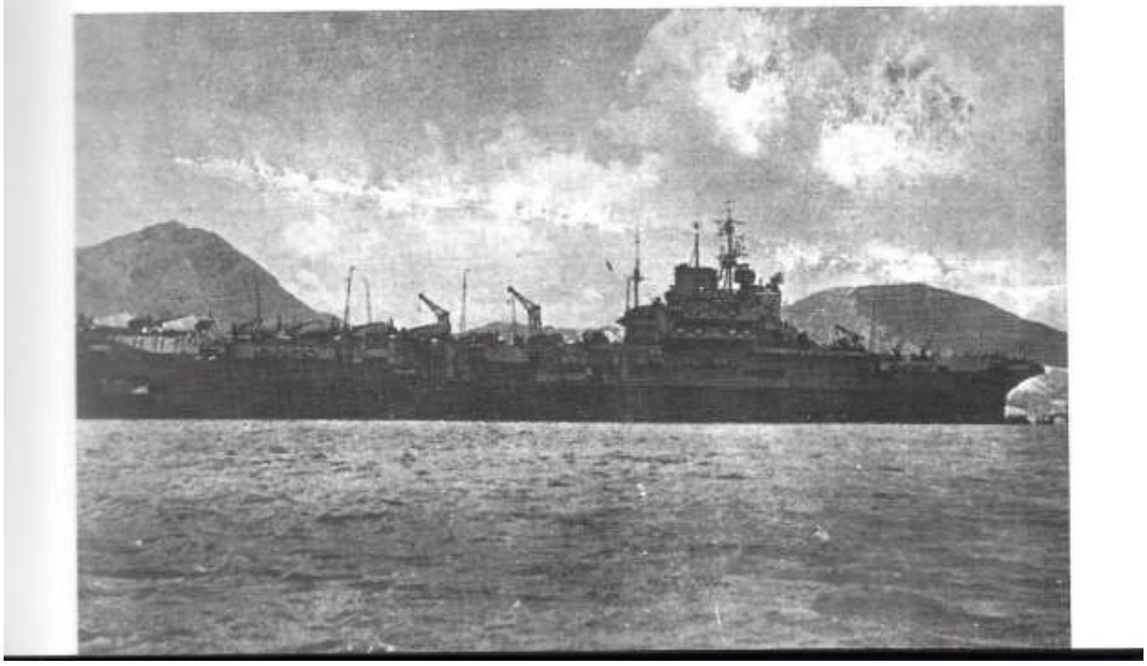


The banner the 61ª Group OA during a military ceremony. The unit under the command of Lt. Col. Chierighini was assigned to the newly established CSIR Aviation and sent to Russia in July 1941

The CV "Indomitabile" operating in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea several times engaged in the transport of war material of US production. It was badly damaged in 1941.



Progress and improvement had also occurred in the Maritime Reconnaissance whose operational tasks and the daily dangers, were positively and fraternally acquitted and shared by airmen and sailors share the same fate, in the same plane, in the same mission of war.

However remained unsolved was the problem of aero-naval cooperation or at least if there were undoubtedly some progress and improvements, these had not reached the desired levels and desirable for a number of reasons, valid or not, to mistrust which still stagnated origins or preventions on both sides, technical problems, lack of joint training and other marginal aspects.

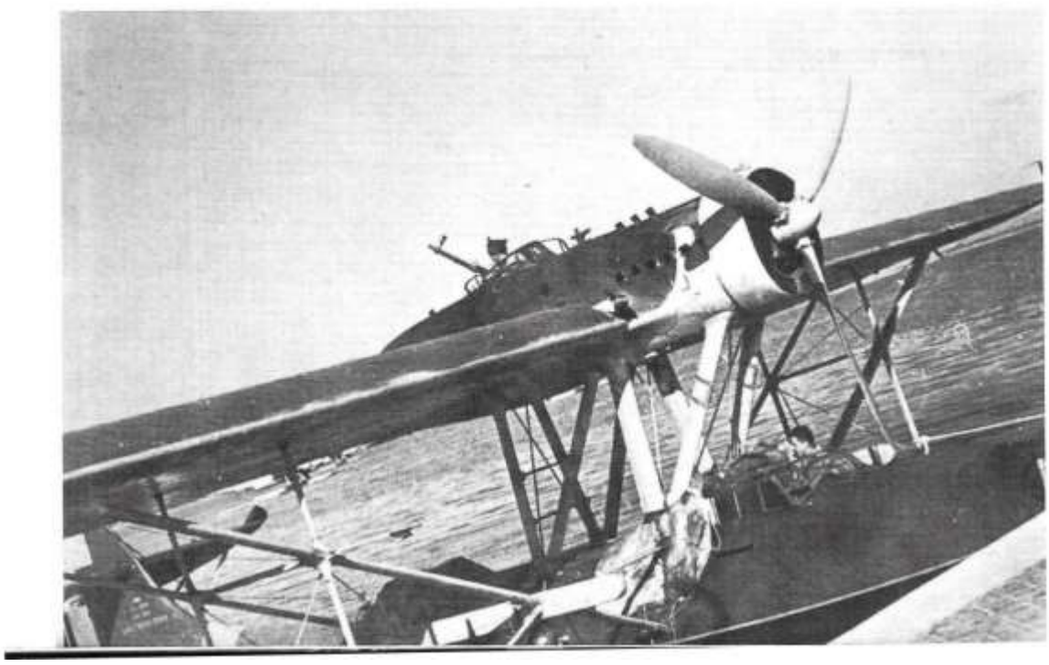
The Royal Navy continued to harbour resentment towards the Air Force over the institutional prerogatives assigned by law to the Azure Arm and over the hybrid co-participation existing within Marinavia, and in the opinion of Supermarina, it was necessary to grant sailors at least the technical-professional training of seafaring personnel to make them more involved in naval needs and also to assign the Navy studies to improve the performance of aviation in the naval field.

It would benefit both of the armed forces with positive practical results, improved operational cooperation, more clarity and fairness in official relations.

Maritime Reconnaissance, which in 1940 numbered 24 squadrons and 6 coastal sections with a total of 237 Cant.501 flying boats and 44 Ro.43 embarked airplanes assigned to the Naval Ships, had not made particular progress of development because there was only one increase of 3 organic squadrons made the reunification of the 6 coastal sections and the total of seaplanes at December 31, 1941 remained virtually unchanged with 238 units with a book value Marinavia, naturally including in that number, losses and replenishment that occurred during the year.

There had been a qualitative improvement in return with the entry into service of 80 new three-engined Cant.506 whose presence now influenced in total of seaplanes to the extent of 25%, also slightly increases the number of Ro.43 by assigning squadrons Naval Forces of a dozen (of Ro.44 of the dissolved CM. squadrons, coming in part from the base of Leros in the Aegean.[544]

Preparations for the departure of an old Cant. 501 R.M - Affectionately called "Mamm'aiut" the CRDA seaplane made throughout the course the course of the conflict precious and irreplaceable services at sea



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From a numerical point of view the overall situation was slightly improved even if the best thing was to order quality for the award of more handsome Cant.506, with respect to Cant.501, more speed (365 km/h) autonomy (2750 km.), and general characteristics. The dissolution of the 31st and 35th Stormi BM had contributed to a further shift of the three-engine CRDA to Marinavia. The problem of the replacement of the Cant.501 was started in solution with the start of production of the twin engine flying boat Fiat/CMASA RS.14 - speed 390 km/h autonomy. 2500 km, tangency 6300 m. -which, exceeded in the 1941 tests at the 2nd CSA of Vigna di Valle, was in the year gradually assigned first primary to the 184th Sqd. RM (Capt. Francesco Valvo) and later to the 170th (Capt. Luciano Tandini) located respectively in Vigna di Valle and Augusta (Sicily).

The aircraft possessed good flying qualities and nautical while burdened with a heavy load on the upper wing of the CRDA designed flying boat, and its general performance rather than supplant those of Cant.501, will eventually fit between the operational capabilities of the old Cant.501, undoubtedly more modest, and far higher than those of the Cant.506.

In the area of training, after the new name of the High Command Service Aviation for the Navy to replace the Inspectorate of Aviation for the Navy still under the command of Gen. B.A. Francesco Marini, the issue of service provisions was done with the supplement no. 3 of 01/14/40, and the sort order changes with staffing provided to the operation of the command and at the squadrons stationed in the ports.

The Supermarina formed two reserve and replenishment units for Ro. 43-44 embarked aircraft (one in La Spezia, the other in Taranto), whose pilots, in addition to normal training, also carried out alternative coastal surveillance missions; a unit of embarked aircraft for the R.N. « Miraglia » had also been formed for tests and training in catapulting and surveillance during war navigation, for the preparation of the officers of the R.A. destined for the GG.NN. [Capital Ships] as heads of the Air Service.

The war legislation had been modified by the planned Di.Na. n. 2 (Naval Directive N.2) for the use of Aviation for the Navy, compiled guidelines and technical and professional training standards for staff of the embarked aircraft, approved the rules for the close observation, the time spent on ship's aircraft, the collection of pointing data for A/A batteries, increased oceangoing flight with Ro.43 improved as autonomy,[545]

The crew of the victorious U.81 its operational debut in the Mediterranean to the return of the mission of the sinking CV "Ark Royal "- Other U.Boote sank the BB "Barham" and CL "Galatea".

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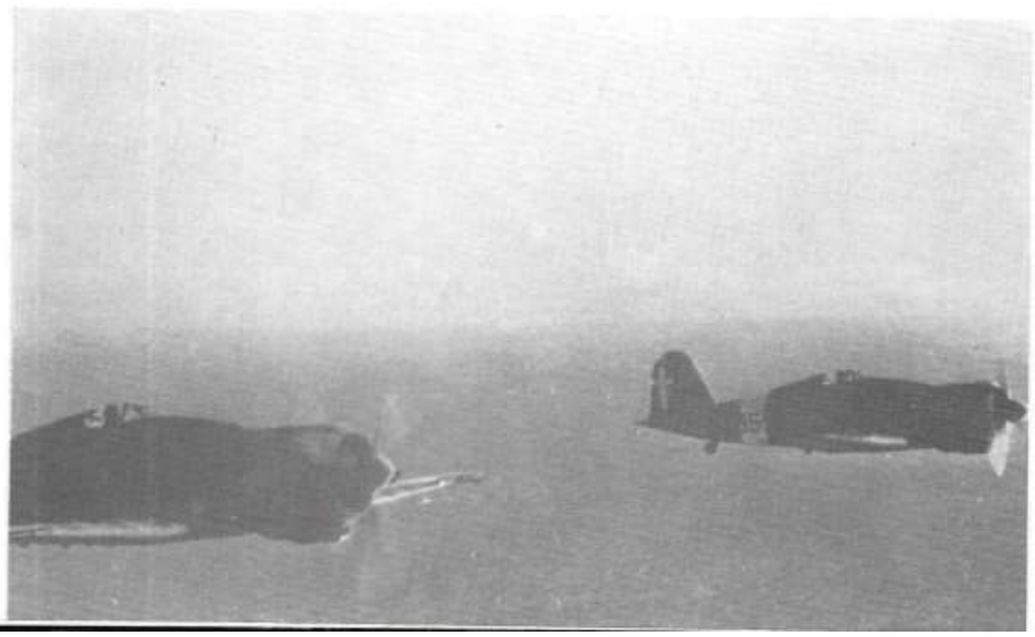
Airmen and sailors of Maritime Reconnaissance in fraternal collaboration of intent of Mediterranean operate in risky missions of war in which they often have in common a unique and dramatic destiny.

Pair of G 50 the 352nd Sqd (20th CT Group - Lt Col. M. Bonzano) in flight naval escort. This stressful security service was managed with great spirit of self-denial and sacrifice by Italian pilots.



implemented an exercise radio-direction finder program for using the RG onboard in the discovery reports and intercepts of R.T. stations, intensified anti-submarine exercises with bombs for the control of deviation from various altitudes, studied the most appropriate anti-submarine tactics to attack immersed or surfaced submarines, made a special smoked signaling to indicate the presence of a submarine, perform of A/A firing exercises with a towed sleeve by ships and batteries, and for students range finding training of the Schools of Pula and Gaeta, changed the signs C.S.A.N. (Reporting Code Aero Naval) to adapt to new demands of war.

The GS of the Royal Navy also urged Superaereo for running assistance for new aircraft to be assigned to battleships and cruisers, to replace the Ro.43 now considered outdated.

It was being tested for such reconnaissance service the new twin-engine CRDA Cant.515 flying boat speed on 400 km/h, range km. 1990 crew 4 persons designed to replace specifically the Cant.501 now definitely obsolete, objectively considering that the new RS.14 had revealed different characteristics.

Another twin-engine flying boat in assessment for reconnaissance-school had already passed the tests of military approvals and initiated a pre-run of 12 specimens, was the Ca.316 with speed of 320 km/h, autonomy of 2100 km, 4 seats in the cabin for the crew.

The twin-engine Caproni was subjected during 1941 to an intense series of tests by Marinavia and aircraft as they were delivered by the Caproni Montecolino Iseo establishment, they went to assignment to the Taranto Naval Reserve Unit and the Maritime Observation School of Taranto (Col. Epifanio Del Ponte) -then transferred to Orbetello -for the training of observer officer of the Royal Navy.

To improve existing infrastructure were made a series of works on seaplane bases at Massacciuccoli, Vigna di Valle, Nisida, Taranto, Augusta, Venice-S. Andrea, Stagnone to adapt them to the needs of war.

The service orders issued in 1940 for Marinavia aircraft, established initially as provision on naval ships to embark a single catapult aircraft and second reserve a seaplane no fuel on board; seaplanes should not remain moored to the buoy for a period longer than 24 hours to prevent oxidation to the hulls; aircraft also had to be closely guarded by armed sentries.

The use of Ro.43 with standard autonomy of 4-5 hours at a cruising speed of 180 km/h and optimal height of 2500-3000 meters, established the service running for close exploration, reports on enemy naval forces in the tactical phase, possible an advanced Antisom escort, for the shot correction data transmission.

Before lofting was required to communicate to the pilot the ship's position with latitude-longitude (square and sub-square position), course and speed of the ship, the distance of the nearest part of the national territory, the support bases, the methods of recognition, overflight and splashdown in the relevant areas of the MM Departments, the purpose of the mission entrusted to the executive procedures of the mission, the news known about the enemy and the alleged location at sea, information on friendly naval forces, presence of any other domestic aircraft in the affected area (all information were given to the order of flight in writing to embarked aircraft).

The signals for the planes to do with flags were thus established:

P3Y = Get ready to catapult

P3 Rb = catapulting to be made after turn (or speed increase)

Pl. = Crew on board

P3 DD = Away within one minute

P3Y with black flag = lofting postponed

The types of exploration to be carried out included the Z (sea area bounded by coordinates) and S (exploration of a given field than the naval force, moving), overflight of a triangular area of sea with the top unit base 30 minutes (sector of 80° to 45 miles instance by the vessel) two phases of -an expulsion phase of return towards the apex of the triangle to control the position by repeating the three explorations to the left (or right) of the base ship = PR- prow, MD- forecastle straight, MS- forecastle left -TD- forecastle right -TS- forecastle left, GD- sideways right, GS- sideways left.[546]

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The reports for the observation of naval shot from transmitting to naval forces with CSAN code were as follows:

ML -Shot long
L - Shot long (followed by no. Of alleged thousand meters)
PL - Shot little long (thousand meters n.)
K - Shot centered
PC Shot little short - (thousand meters n.)
C - Shot short (thousand meters n.)
MC - Shot very short
R - deviation left (followed by no. Of thousand meters alleged)
M - deviation to right (thousand meters n.)

In this special form of collaboration fellowship between airmen and sailors reached excellent results and at least at the tactical level of service and were eliminated misunderstandings resentments, jealousies, suspicions, which we believe should not exist or persist even higher level.

During the year was completed the staff of the Naval Air Service personnel for the aircraft boarded on naval ships which resulted as follows:

Chief of the Naval Forces Air Service. -Lt Col. Mario Giannini
RN "Littorio" - Capt. Lucio Scarpetta (then Capt. Angelo Notarbartolo Villarosa)
RN "Vittorio Veneto" -Capt. Donato Tondi
RN "Giulio Cesare" -Capt. Grecco Marco Tullio
RN "Bande Nere" -Capt. Marco Varini
RN "Eugenio di Savoia" -Capt. Guido Marzattmocci
RN "Gorizia" -Capt. Gastone Mezzeitti
RN “Trento” -Lt. Guido Grasselli
RN "Cadorna" - Lt. Pietro Leva
RN "Duca D'Aosta” -Lt. Giobatta Durante
RN "Attendolo” - Lt. Demetrio Nava
RN “Montecuccoli “-Lt. Giovanni Vacca

The Marinavia Command had as Vice Commander Col. Luigi Questa, while Col. Mario Piroddi was in command Navy Naples charged with the organization of Anti-sub escorts in convoys towards N.A.

The Air Force Command for the Royal Navy at the M. M. departments were the following:

Upper Tyrrhenian -Col. Emanuele Moscone
Lower Tyrrhenian -Col. Bruno Fuiloni
Upper Adriatic -Lt. Col. Adalberto Zanchi
Ionian- Lower Adriatic -Lt. Col. Michele Palmiotti
Sicily -Lt. Col. Mario Morelli then Col. Gino Felicetti
Sardinia -Col. Giuseppe Perucatti then Lt. Col. Giuseppe Bertocco
Aegean -Lt. Col. Goffredo Di Loreto[547]

In November of 1941 he was sent to the Mediterranean II Flieger Korps (Lt. Gen. Bruno Loerzer) and constituted the 2nd Luftflotte (Kesselring) with The X Kps Fl and Fl. Fu. Afrika. A new command-in-chief for the south was set up with the OBS.

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The reserve naval forces Air unit of La Spezia was under the command of Capt. Filippo Tomassetti while the newly formed Group C Marinavia was entrusted to Capt. Giario Risaliti.

The arrival in Italy of X Fllieger Korps before and II Fl.Kps. at the end of 1941, the Italian Navy had a positive result for the beginning of an effective collaboration service with the Germans to organize convoys escorts for Libya using multi-engine Luftwaffe aircraft, which in addition to carry out surveillance and anti-submarine missions officers provided also to provide additional information on the sighting of enemy ships at sea; what add after delivery to the Italian Navy from the Kriegs Marine of the first De-Te radar and Metox detectors of emissions installed on board the ships of the battle fleet, detectors manned first by German operators and later by Italian specialists.

To enable this important service that signaled well in advance of the presence of RAF planes equipped with A.S.V., the Luftwaffe assigned some operators and liaison officers to radio in voice (Luftnachrichten) that were embarked on the following ships:

RN "Vittorio Veneto" -Lt. Sparman
RN "Caio Duilio" -Lt. Schoffer
RN "Duca D'Aosta" -Lt. Deschner
RN "Gorizia" -Lt. Brugemaun
RN "Garibaldi" -Lt. Livk

Luftmelde unit (for sighting stations with Funkmess) were assigned to Taranto, Naples and La Spezia to improve defenses and avoid RAF surprises.

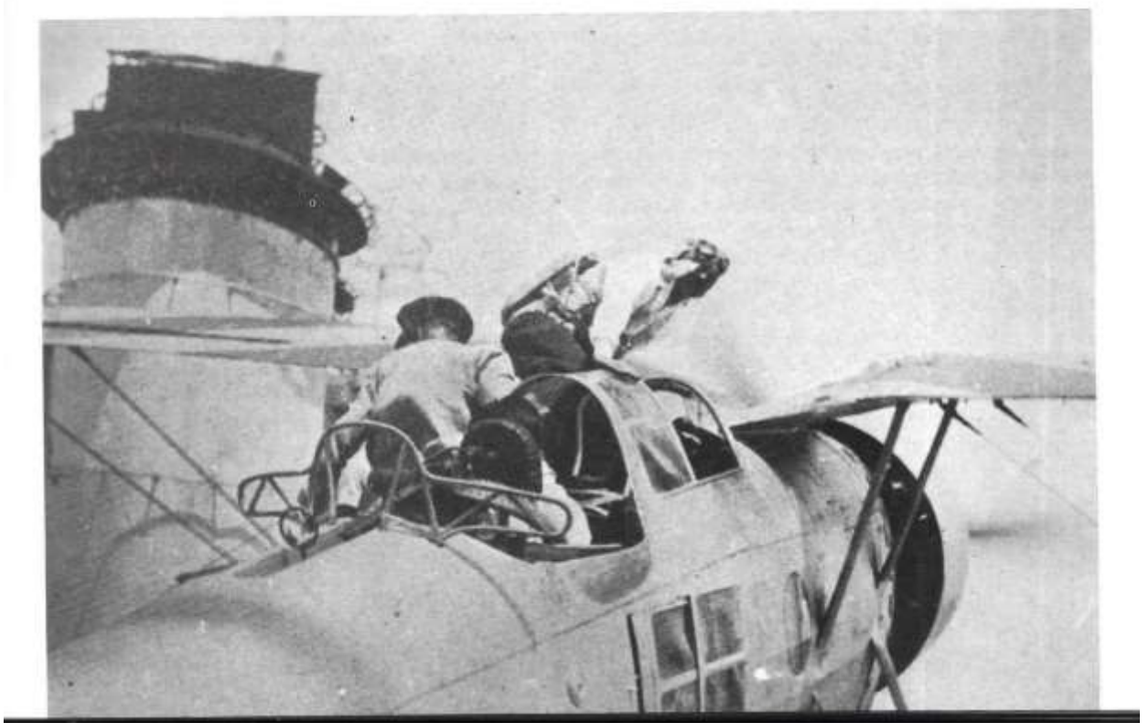
THE ACTIVITY OF WAR

Even in the 2nd year of war the Aviation for the Navy paid a high tribute to sacrifices in men and planes, losing 10% of the force ascertained at January 1, 1941.

The approximately 240 Marinavia aircraft of 1941 showed an average availability of 147 units efficient in the 1st quarter of, 166 in the 2nd and 173 in the 3rd with a gradual and steady increase of the aircraft ready for the mission.

The service incidents were very numerous and caused the loss of 17 aircraft and 34 fallen of the embarked personnel.[548]

Preparations for the departure of a Ro 43 catapult [lane of thevR.N. "Bande Nere" -211. Even these small seaplane embarked they provided valuable assistance in the aero-naval warfare in the Mediterranean.



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On January 7 had already had a first serious when left a Cant.506 the 170th Sqd. taking off from Augusta, collided with his float the rigging of a sailing vessel unbalanced and fell into the sea, causing the death of Lt. Carmine Santoro.

On the 24th of the same month another Cant. 506 of the 170th was severely damaged by an attack of British fighters from Malta and forced to alight with wounded on board.

It was lost due to a misunderstanding caused by enemy cunning, a Cant.501 of the 186th Sqd. piloted by Capt. Aldo Bellenzier, commander of the unit, which, diverted by a furious storm, was heading near an island mistakenly believed to be Lampedusa and attracted to land on the water by a searchlight was captured by the enemy garrison on the island of Comino in the Maltese archipelago.

On January 25th another Cant.501 of the 189th, piloted by the squadron commander Capt. Pietro Cosulich, disappeared, forced to ditch due to a fault and disappeared without any trace after the frantic searches by rescuers who had been joined by the first German rescue aircraft of the Seenot Dienst service based in Syracuse, with seaplanes of the He.59 and Do.24 type.

Strafing and sporadic bombings were registered during the year on the bases of the maritime reconnaissance aircraft, with damage to Cant. 501/506 and the destruction of some flying boats including 3 Cant.506/S of the 612th Sqd. Relief of Syracuse, who had to suffer the proportionately higher losses.

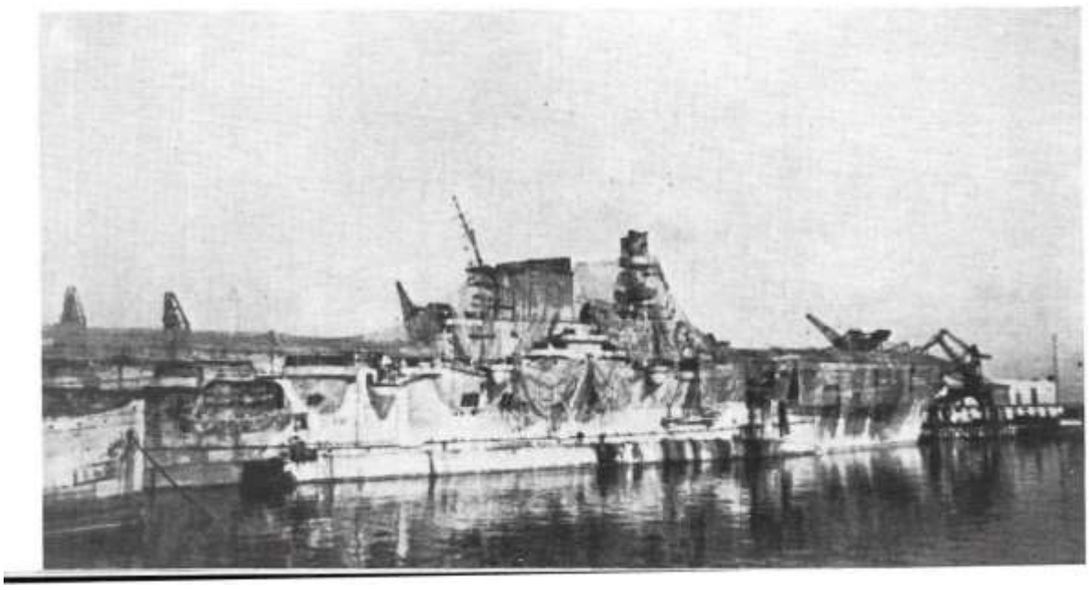
In June, was lost to enemy attack another Cant.506 of the 170th Sqd. RM and in August was lost for damage due to bursts of Hurricane machineguns another 506 of the 184th with the loss of the pilots.

4 Cant. 501/506 flying boats of the 83rd Group R.M. were destroyed for various incidents between July and September with the death of seven crew members and injuring four others.

A splendid episode of sacrifice and self-denial was the star the crew of a Cant. 506 of the 186th attacked by enemy fighters hitting the aircraft in many areas, seriously injuring two crew members, including the 2nd Lt. Oss. Leonardo Madoni and Sgt. Pilot Canlo Pirotta, was killed while in defensive turret was 1st Av. Mot. Enrico Miola.

Forcibly splashed down and left the Cant. 506 semi-sunk from further attacks of the Hurricane, transferring surviving the personal in a small boat and waited for help that came with a flying boat promptly and fraternally, trying repeatedly to alight and succeeding even with rough sea, to ensure the safety of five men.[549]

Belatedly as often it happens in Italian affairs, in 1941 was begun the transformation into a CV of the transatlantic "Roma" of 28000 TSL..
The new ships under construction was CV called "Aquila" (A Collection Fraccaroli)



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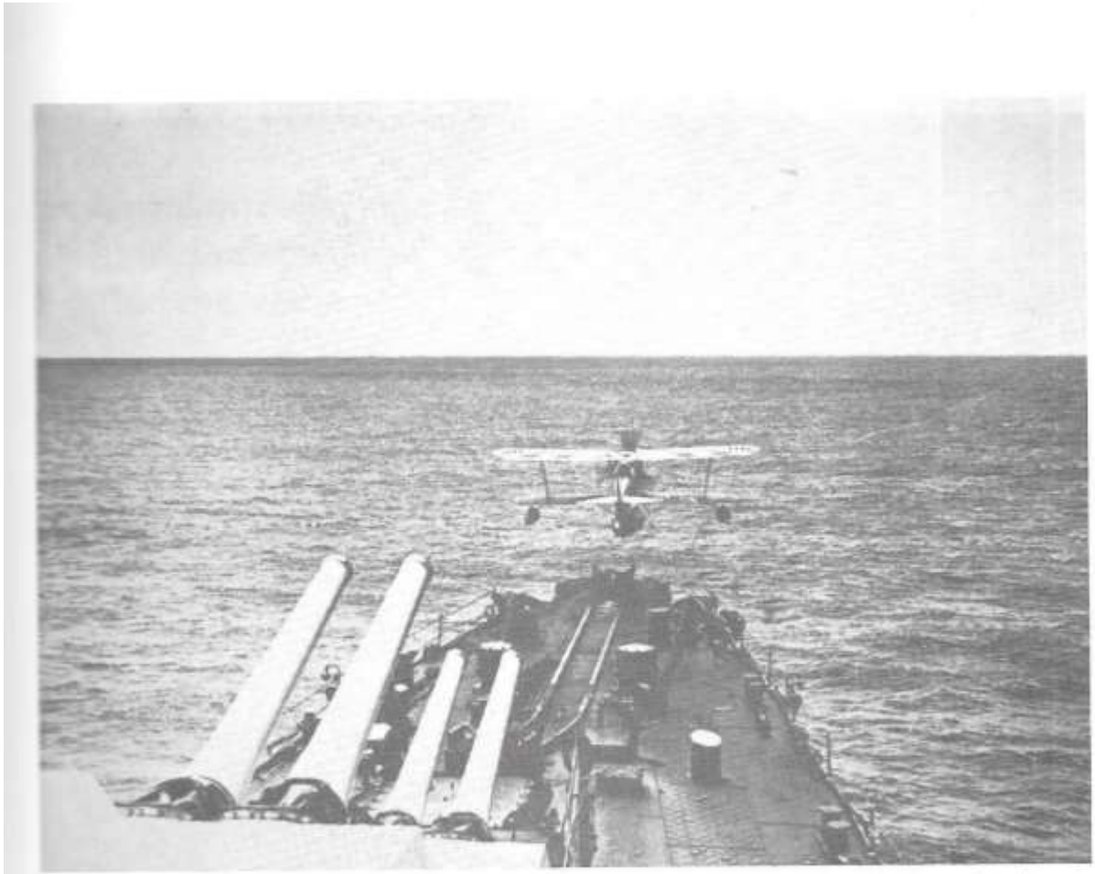

The Ro. 43 flies away from a cruiser "Colleoni" class for a reconnaissance mission. In 1941 he began his studies to equip the GGNN, with a faster and suitable catapult aircraft.

Rescued first by a Cant.506 of the 186th Sqd. but blocked by the sea conditions, the survivors had to wait for many more hours before the arrival of a rescue boat from the 611th Sqd. from Benghazi, which picked up four of the five shipwrecked people, avoiding a further dangerous transfer for the young Navy observation officer, who had encouraged his companions to resist and to hope with great strength of spirit.

The aircraft was carrying toward the nearest coast of Cyrenaica and alighted a short distance from the beach to avoid any damage, where a brave Army doctor did not hesitate to throw himself by swimming to rescue the seriously injured person, who, transshipments on the raft, will be brought to Barce but where he will die. He will be decorated M.O.v.m. the valiant and unfortunate 2nd Lt. Leonardo Madoni of the 186th Sqd. R.M.

During the year, the other two naval officers observers: the 2nd Lt. Giuseppe Majorana of the 287th Sqd. R.M. and Lt. Antonio Forni who were decorated with the M.O.v.m. in memory; reward equal to the valor they had as the airmen 2nd Lt. pilot Giovanni Del Vento and 1st Av. Arm. Carmelo Raiti of the 287th Sqd. R.M. died in the same mission.

In the month of December they were lost another 5 seaplanes for enemy attack and accidents and 12 died between airmen and sailors while others remaining 6 were wounded.

The year end of the Maritime Reconnaissance included a total of 9,920 combat missions with 43,383 flight hours (the 83rd Group alone had totaled 9,679 flight hours), 7 aircraft lost in combat missions and 17 incidents. 7 enemy planes were shot down by the staff.[550]

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Various events
Neutral Air Forces
Various Statistics

Sweden - United States of America[551]

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Various events
Neutral Air Forces
Various Statistics

Movements of Aerial Arm units in 1941

Bombing Units Transformations
35th Stormo BT (formerly BM),
86th Group BT (formerly BM),
95th Group BT (Formerly BM),
28th Group Aut. BT(Formerly 8th St.BT),
239th Sqd. Aut. BaT (Formerly 97th Gr. BaT),
54th Group Aut.BT (Pos. franework),
236th Sqd. Aut. BaT (Formerly 96th Gr. BaT),
239th Sqd. Aut. BaT (to 97th Gr. BaT),
34th Group AS (formerly BT),
279th/281st Sqd. AS (to 34th Gr. AS),
30th Group Aut. BT (formerly 10th St. BT),
39th Group Aut. (formerly 38th St. BT),
19th Sqd. Aut. BT (formerly 28th Gr. BT),
56th Group Aut. BT (formerly 39th St. BT),
279th Sqd. Aut. AS (formerly 34th Gr. AS),
239th Sqd. BaT (formerly 97th Gr. Aut. BaT),
29th/33rd Gr. BT (to 9th St. BT),
51st Group Aut. BT (formerly 16th St. BT),
31st Group Aut. BT(formerly 18th St. BT),
36th Stormo AS (Formerly BT),
41st Group Aut. AS (formerly BT)

Fighters
93rd Sqd. Aut. CT (formerly 8th Gr. CT),
8th Group Aut. CT,
12th Group Aut. CT (formerly Assault),
16th Group CT (formerly assault),
356th Sqd. Aut. CT (formerly 21st Gr. CT),
356th Sqd. CT (to 21st Gr. CT),
374th Sqd. Aut. CT,
370th Sqd. Aut. CT (formerly 153rd Gr. Aut. CT),
7th Group Aut. CT (formerly 54th St. CT),
161st/163rd Sqd. CM (to 161st Gr. Aut. CT),
10th Group Aut. CT (formerly 4th St. CT),
153rd Gr. Aut. CT (to 53rd St. CT),
9th Group Aut. CT(formerly 4th St. CT),
18th Group Aut. CT (formerly 56th St., CT),
20th Group Aut. CT (formerly 56th St. CT)

Transport - Rescue
56th Group T. (formerly BT)
18th Stormo T. (formerly BT)
37th Group T (formerly BT)[552]

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Constitutions	*Bombing*	*Fighters*	*Recon*	*Transport-Rescue*
Com. RA/CSIR	Com. Bomb. Leone	Com. Fighter Aquila	173rd Sqd. RST	244th Sqd. Aut. T
Com. RA/Greece	Com. Bomb. Sicily	377th Sqd. CT	174th Sqd. RST	Sec. Aut. Rescue
	Sec. Spec. Bomb. (3rd ZAT)	155th Gr. Aut. CT	176th Sqd. RST	(4th ZAT)
		156th Gr. Aut. CT	244th Sqd. RS	245th Sqd. Aut. T
	Com. 9th Brigade. Leone	161st Gr. Aut. CT	Sec. Aut. RST	246th Sqd. Aut. T
	101st Gr. Aut. BaT	171st Gr. Aut. CN	(SM / RA)	145th Aut Group. T
	130th Group Aut. AS	164th Sqd. Aut. CT	Sec. Aut. Cinem.	600th Sqd. Aut. S
	284th Sqd. Aut. AS	51st Stormo CT	(SM / RA)	
	274th Sqd. Aut. BGR	300th Sqd. Aut. CN		

Transfers	*Bombing*	Drago)	(to 20th Gr. Aut. CT)	8th Group CT
	37th Group Aut. BT	30th Group BT	370th Sqd. CT	(to 2nd St. CT)
	(to 18th St. BT)	(to 10th St. BT)	(to 3rd Gr. Aut. CT)	352nd Sqd. CT
	209th Sqd. BaT	39th Group BT	7th Group Aut. CT	(20th Gr. CT)
	(97th Gr. Aut. BaT)	(to 38th St. BT),	(54th St. CT)	361st/395th Sqd. CT
	238th Sqd. BaT	105th Group BT	20th Group Aut. CT	(from 154th to 24th Gr.
	(to 101st Gr. Aut.	(to 46th St. BT)	(to 51st St. CT)	CT)
	BaT)	28th Group Aut. BT	371st Sqd. Aut. CT	
	43rd Stormo BT	(to 8th St. BT)	(to 150th Gr. Aut. CT)	164th Sqd. Aut. CT
	(to Com. Bomb.		73rd Sqd. Aut. CT	(to foreign -Esig. I)
	Drago).		To (9th Gr. Aut. CT)	363rd Sqd. CT
	25th Group Aut., BT	*Fighters*	93rd Sqd. Aut. CT	(from 160th to 150th Gr.
	(to 7th St. BT)	376th Sqd. Aut. CT	(to 8th Gr. Aut. CT)	CT)
	13th Stormo BT	(Com. Borea fighter)	352nd Sqd. Aut. CT	164th Sqd. Aut., CT
	(to Com. Bomb.	151st Sqd. CT	(ex 20th Gr. CT)	(161st Gr. Aut. CT)

Dissolutions	*Bombing*	*SM/South-E.A.*	(framework)	50th Assault Stormo
Com. RA / E.A	4th Bis Group BT	31st Stormo BT	16th Group BT	410th Sqd. Aut. CT
Com. RA / CAI	29th Bis Group BT	93rd Group BM	34th Group Aut. AS	411th Sqd. Aut. CT
	44th Group BT	39th Stormo BT	97th Group Aut.	412th Sqd. Aut. CT
	49th Group BT	92nd Group BT	BaT	413th Sqd. Aut. CT
	28th Bis Group BT	34th Group Aut. BT		409th Sqd. CT
	27th Bis Group BT	26th Group BT	*Fighters*	(framework)
	26th Bis Group BT	54th Group Aut. BT	Com. Ftr. Albania	
	25th Bis Group BT	34th Stormo BT		*Reconnaissance*
		(framework)	Com. Ftr. Aquila	172nd Sqd. RST
	31st Bis Group BT	52nd/53rd Group BT	13th Div. Aer. Pegaso	110th Sqd. OAT
	41st Sqd. Aut.	(Framework)	2nd Stormo CT	
	SM / E.A	114th Group Aut. BT	52nd Stormo CT	
	13th Sqd. Aut. BT	Sec. Spec. B.G.A.	56th Stormo CT	*Transport*
	118th Sqd. Aut. BT	49th Group BT	152nd Group CT	611th Sqd. T.
	Sqd. Aut.	96th Group Aut.	154th Group CT	244th Sqd. T.
	SM / North-E.A	BaT (framework)	Sec. Aut. CT	600th Sqd. T.
	Sqd. Aut.	237th Sqd. BaT	(3rd ZAT)	Group. T./E.A[553]

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Air Force Situation on 1-July-1941

1st AIR FLEET

Bombing command "Drago"	13th Stormo BT	11th Group BT	1st Sqd. BT
			4th Sqd. BT
		43rd Group BT	rd Sqd. B.T.
			5th Sqd. BT
	7th Stormo BT	4th Group BT	14th Sqd. BT
			15th Sqd. BT
		25th Group BT	th Sqd. BT
			9th Sqd. BT
			Nucl. Add. Dive bomber
Fighter command "Boreas"	2nd -Stormo C.T.	8th Group C. T .	92nd Sqd. C.T.
			93rd Sqd. C.T.
			94th Sqd. C.T.
		13th Group C.T.	7th Sqd. C.T.
			78th Sqd. C.T.
			82nd Sqd. C.T.

2nd AIR FLEET

9th Air Brigade "Lenne"	15th Stormo BT	46th BT Group	20th Sqd. BT
			21st Sqd. BT
		47th Group BT	3rd Sqd. BT
			54th Sqd. BT
	41st Stormo BT	59th Group BT	32nd Sqd. BT
			233rd Sqd. BT
		60th Group BT	34th Sqd. BT
			235th Sqd. BT
	14th Stormo BT	44th Group BT	6th Sqd. BT
			7th Sqd. BT
		45th Group BT	nd Sqd. BT
			22nd Sqd. BT
	18th Stormo BT	37th Group BT	7th Sqd. BT
			48th Sqd. BT
	36th Stormo BT	108th Group BT	56th Sqd. BT
			257th Sqd. BT
		109th Group BT	58th Sqd. BT
			259th Sqd. BT
1st Nucleus Torpedo Bomber Training			
	1st Stormo C. T .	6th Group C. T .	9th Sqd. C.T.
			81st Sqd. C.T.
			88th Sqd. C.T.
		17th Group C.T.	1st Sqd. CT
			72nd Sqd. C.T.
			80th Sqd. C.T.[554]

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4th Stormo C. T .		9th Group C.T.	3rd Sqd. C.T.
			96th Sqd. C.T.
			97th Sqd. C.T.
		160th Gr. Aut. C.T.	375th Sqd. C.T.
			393rd Sq d. C.T.
			394th Sqd. C.T.

3rd AIR FLEET

9th Stormo BT	29th Group BT	62nd Sqd. BT
		63rd Sqd. BT
	33rd Group BT	59th Sqd. BT
		60th Sqd. BT
46th Stormo BT	104th Group BT	252nd Sqd. BT
		253rd Sqd. BT
	105th Group BT	254th Sqd. BT
		255th Sqd. BT
	56th Group Aut. BT	222nd Sqd. BT
		223rd Sqd. BT
		274a Sqd. Aut. B.G .R.
		Sec. Spec. Bombardam.

2nd Torpedo Bomber Training Nucleus

52nd Stormo C.T.	12th Group C.T.	159th Sqd. C.T.
		160th Sqd. C.T.
		165th Sqd. C.T.
	21st Group C.T.	356th Sqd. C.T.
		386th Sqd. C.T.
	157th Group C. T.	357th Sdq. C. T.
		384th Sqd. C.T.
		385th Sqd. Aut. C.T.
	153rd Group Aut. C.T.	372nd Sqd. C.T.
		373rd Sqd. C.T.

4th AIR FLEET

35th Stormo B.T;	86th Group BT	190th Sqd. BT
		191st Sqd. BT
	95th Group BT	230th Sqd. BT
		231st Sqd. BT
37th Stormo BT	55th Group BT	220th Sqd. BT
		221st Sqd. BT
	116th Group BT	276th Sqd. BT
		277th Sqd. BT[555]

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	47th Stormo BT	106th Group BT	260th Sqd. BT
			261st Sqd. BT
		107th Group BT	262nd Sqd. BT.
			263rd Sqd. BT
		97th Gr. Aut. B.T	209th Sqd. B.aT.
		240 Group Aut. C.T.	354th Sqd. C.T.
			355th Sqd. C.T.
			361st Sqd. C.T.
			395th Sqd. C. T.
			Rescue section

5th AIR FLEET

13th Air Division "Pegaso"	8th Stormo BT	27th Group BT	18th Sqd. BT
			52nd Sqd. BT
		28th Group BT	10th Sqd. BT
		98th Group Aut. BT	240th Sqd. BT
			241st Sqd. BT
			239th Sqd. B.aT.
			279th Sqd. Aerosil.
		2nd Group Aut. C.T.	150th Sqd. C.T.
			152nd Sqd. C.T.
			358th Sqd. C.T.
		20th Group Aut. C.T.	151st Sqd. C.T.
			352nd Sqd. C.T.
			353rd Sqd. C.T.
Air Force command of Libya			
			236th Sqd. Aut. B.aT.
		151st Group Aut. C.T.	366th Sqd. C.T.
			367th Sqd. C.T.
			368th Sqd. C. T.
		155th Group Aut. C. T.	351st Sqd. C. T.
			360th Sqd. C. T.
			378th Sqd. C.T.
			376th Sqd. Aut. C.T.
			174th S.qd. R.S.T.
			175th Sqd. R.S. T.
			244th Sqd. Aut. Transp.
			614th Sqd. Rescue
East sector Command			19th Sqd. Aut. B. T.
		18th Group Aut. C.T.	83rd Sqd. C.T.
			85th Sqd. C.T.
			95th Sqd. C.T.
			374th Sqd. Aut. C.T.[556]

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AIR FORCE OF SICILY

Command bombing of Sicily	10th Stormo BT	30th Group BT	55th Sqd. BT
			56th Sqd. BT
		32nd Group BT	57th Sqd. BT
			58th Sqd. BT
	30th Stormo BT	87th Group BT	192nd Sqd. BT
			193rd Sqd. BT
		90th Group BT	194th Sqd. BT
			195th Sqd. BT
	43rd Stormo	99th Group BT	242nd Sqd. BT
			243rd Sqd. BT
		31st Group Aut. BT	65th Sqd. BT
			66th Sqd. BT
		101st Gruppo Aut. B.aT.	208th Sqd. B.aT.
			238th Sqd. B.aT.
			278th Sqd. Aeros.
Fighter Command Sicily,	54th Stormo C.T.	7th Group C.T.	76th Sqd. C.T.
			586th Sqd. C.T.
			98th Sqd. C.T.
		16th Group C.T.	167th Sqd. C.T.
			168th Sqd. C.T.
			169th Sqd. C.T.
		10th Group Aut. C.T.	84th Sqd. C.T.
			90th Sqd. C.T.
			91st Sqd. C.T.
		23rd Group Aut. C.T.	70th Sqd. C.T.
			74th Sqd. C.T.
			75th Sqd. C.T.
			173rd Sqd. R.S.T.
			612th Sqd. Rescue

AIR FORCE OF SARDINIA

32nd Stormo BT	38th Group BT	49th Sqd. BT
		50th Sqd. BT
	89th Group BT	228th Sqd. BT
		229th Sqd. BT
	51st Group Aut. BT	212th Sqd. BT
		213th Sqd. BT
		280th Sqd. Aerosilur.
		613th Sqd. Rescue
	3rd Group Aut. C.T.	153rd Sqd. C.T.
		154th Sqd. C.T.
		155th Sqd. C.T.
		370th Sqd. C. T.[557]

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AIR FORCE OF ALBANIA

Fighter Command of Albania		22nd Group Aut. C.T.	359th Sqd. C.T.
			362nd Sqd. 'C.T.
			369th Sqd. C. T.
		150th Group Aut. C.T.	363rd Sqd. C.T.
			364th Sqd. C.T.
			365th Sqd. C. T.
			371st Sqd. C.T.
	38th Stormo BT	39th Group BT	51st Sqd. BT
			69th Sqd. BT
		40th Group BT	202nd Sqd. BT
			203rd Sqd. BT

AEGEAN AIR FORCE

	39th Stormo BT	Group 92nd BT	200th Sqd. BT
			201st Sqd. BT
		41st Group Aut. BT	204th Sqd. BT
			205th Sqd. BT
		50th Group Aut. BT	210th Sqd. BT
			211th Sqd. BT
			281st Sqd. Aerosil.
			172nd Sqd. R.S. T.
		161st Group Aut. C.T.	162nd Sqd. C.T.
			163rd Sqd. C.T.
			164th Sqd. C.T.
			161st Sqd. Aut. C. M.
			Section Relief

War activities between 06/10/1940 – 12/31/1941

	No. of Actions	Aircraft employed	flight hours	Kg bombs dropped	Aircraft lost
1st Air Fleet	494	1,651	2,645	97,124	7
2nd Air Fleet	1,857	5,783	9,460	720,408	31
3rd Air Fleet	179	534	813	72,638	2
4th Air Fleet	3,546	10,272	21,000	4,160,427	35
5th Air Fleet	14,572	33,688	61,665	2,672,559	164
Air Force Sardinia	5,841	14,649	2,898	517,286	76
Air Force Sicily	889	2,176	5,404	336,806	31
Aegean Air Force	1,907	4,102	11,961	690,533	23
Air Force Albania	3,719	13,813	22,344	1,050,639	44
Air Force Greece	33	83	220	2,600	-
E.A. Air Force	3,623	6,114	12,460	1,143,600	39
C.A.I./C.S.I.R.					
Balkan / Iraq / Syria	412	2,102	3,292	64,904	12
Various units / RST	112	416	1,282	1,200	-
Total	56,303	117,272	241,730	11,534,724	495

Note: The number of machine guns (cal. 7.7 to 12.7) rounds fired ascends approximately to 2,300,000 while the number of bombs and fragmentation launched had been approximately 415,000 weapons. The national data for aircraft lost included those killed in the course of missions of enemy territories.[558]

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Breakdown of war activity by specialty

	Action	aircraft employed	Flying hours	Bombs n.	Shots Fired No.
Bombing	4,691	15,261	48,922	240,223	600,847
Torpedoing	274	632	2,195	(215) +	15,932
Reconnaissance-escort	5,503	8,240	27,429	10,019	47,677
Fighter	21,308	64,486	104,748	17,370	1,121,416
Marinavia	12,260	17,459	38,239	1,467	145,479
Esercitavia	4,644	5,080	7,737	47,647	93,808
E.A.	3,623	6,114	12,460	143,000	258,000
Total	56,303	117,272	241,730	459.726+ 215 torpedoes	2,283,159

National aircraft lost (killed in combat)	n. 495
National aircraft lost due to various causes of war	n. 864
total	n.1359
Enemy aircraft shot down / destroyed on the ground	n. 1,408
Enemy aircraft probably destroyed	No. 582
Total	n. 1,990

NEUTRAL AIR FORCES
SPAIN

In 1941 Spain was still trying to recover from the bloody civil war that many deaths had caused the destruction in the country. The Spanish Air Force (Ejercito del'Aire) included numerous but heterogeneous aircraft, in all foreign-made (Italian and German) as well as war booty aircraft: Russian, Czechoslovakian, English, American, French.

The structure of the renewed Spanish national aviation was divided as well as in commands, Technical Institutions, Schools and Services of 11 Aviation Regiment as follows:

Bombing

11th Regiment	Martin Bomber	Albacete	n. -
12th Regiment	SM.79	Granada-Davila	n. 43
13th Regiment	SM.79	Seville-Los Lanos	n. 40
14th Regiment	He.111/Katiuska	Zaragoza (20 + 12)	n. 32
15th Regiment	He.111	Logrono	n. 23
33rd Regiment	SM.81-Ca.310	Valladoli'd (31 +7)	n. 38
1st Regiment mixed	BR.20 /Do.17 (11th Gr./44° Gr.)	Alcala (10 + 10)	n. 20
			n. 196[559]

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Fighters

21st Regiment.	CR.32	Getafe	n. 64
22nd Regiment.	CR.32 / Rata	Seville (32 + 10)	n. 42
23rd Regiment.	Bf.109 / CR.32	Leon-Valenzuela (12 + 12)	n. 24
32nd Regiment.	Curtiss	Alicante- Rabasa	n. 30
31st Regiment.	He.51	Getafe	n. 27
Independent Group	He.51	Canary	n. 12
61st Sqd. Dive	Hs.123	Tablada	n. 12
			n. 211

Morocco

27th Fighter-Interceptor Group	Tohuina-Melilla	12 He.112-6 G.50
43rd Aerial Observation Group	Aumara	15 Natachas
51st Sqd. Maritime reconnaissance	Atalayon	6 Dornier Wal
41st Sec. Ground Observation	Sania Manuel	6 Hs. 126
		39

Balearic

3rd Reg. Mixed (28th Gr. Fighter-113th Gr. Bomb.)	Son San Juan	30 CR.32 - 12He.111
51st Gr. Maritime reconnaissance		
52nd Sqd.	Pollenza	3 He.59- 2 He.60
53rd Sqd.	Pallenza	4 Cant.501-506
		49

Canaries

4th Regt. Mixed (29th Gr. Ftr-122ndGr. Transp.)	Las Palmas	30 CR.32 - 3 Ju.52
54th Sqd. Maritime reconnaissance	Gaudo	6 Dornier Wal
		39

Aircraft School and Service of the G.S.		n. 172 (various aircraft)
Aircraft for training for school G.S.		n. 135 (various aircraft)
	Total Aircraft	n. 841

Among the various aircraft included 10 Ba.65, 4 He.70, 22 He.45, 22 Ju.52.

The Francoist government policy despite the ideological trends for Axis and gratitude for the great help provided by Italy and Germany to the victorious conclusion of the Spanish Civil War, had proved since the beginning of the conflict, elusive, friendly but without particular impairments and on several occasions the Caudillo had disappointed and embittered Hitler and Mussolini, rejecting requests and concessions too daring to Axis (such as a project of the OKW to attack Gibraltar by allowing the passage of German troops through Spain).

Against Italy tolerate certain situations of favor but strictly interning all military aircraft that landed in Spain.

SWEDEN

Neutral Sweden, situated in the far north of Europe, had also to keep at bay the Warring States on the edge of the Baltic Sea, as Switzerland tried to do in the heart of Europe and Turkey to the south-east of the Mediterranean and Spain in the west.[560]

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Sweden's interest in Italy had increased at the beginning of the war with the decreed American embargo on military supplies, which had pushed many small nations worried about the spread of the conflict, to supply themselves with Italian war material and mainly airplanes requested by France, Belgium, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece.

The first supply of Italian aircraft to Flygvapnet occurred indirectly, after a group of 12 CR.42s purchased for Finland with a popular Swedish subscription, had been refused by the Finnish Air Force, which was alienated from including in its units in the war against the USSR, outdated open-cockpit biplane fighters such as Hurricane, Morane, Messerschrnitt, Curtiss, Brewster.

Sweden held the CR.42 and in the absence of better ordered another 160 similar fighter, 60 Re.2000 interceptors, 80 twin-engine Ca.313 what price to safeguard the neutrality to be employed to a great number of heterogeneous aircraft comprising MS.406, H.75/A, Curtiss, Fieseler Fi. 156, Klemm Kl.35, FW.44 and others including Gloster "Gladiator" and Ju.86.

At the same time the Swedish industry was working to make domestic products including the fighter J.22 F.F.V.S. that would reach 576 km/h and the twin-engine bomber 18/A of the SAAB with speeds of 465 km/h.

The Royal Swedish Air Force was structured on a High Command, a Air War School, a Air Force Academy, a technical organization with three main workshops, 20 aviation Flotillas including 6 heavy and light bombardment, 7 Fighter, a reconnaissance naval, a observation, a terrestrial survey, a torpedo, a bomber school, two special use, a flight of material reserves.

A total of about 600 aircraft mostly modern in design but already technically outdated, divided among thirty major airports scattered over hundreds - of kilometers of territory from the Norwegian border and the Finnish defense of Swedish neutrality.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

1941 was the year that the United States, on the wave of emotion caused by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, broke all further hesitation in their premeditated ideological choice to enter the great world conflict, now expanded beyond measure to cover two-thirds of the globe.

The US Army Air Force, called USAAF (United States Army Air Force) was dependent for the use and administration of the Ministry of War, while the naval equally autonomous under the tactical and administrative aspect and called USNA (United States Naval Aviation) depended on what the Navy together with the USMC (United States Marine Corps) aviation assigned tactical to the support for the units of the Navy landing.

Before the outbreak of the 2nd World Conflict the USAAF (or for the Army Aviation) included in its edition of 1934 by ordering the bombing units, fighters, long-range reconnaissance, tactical support and transport grouped in headquarters of the armed force of the U.S. Army, entrusted to a general officer in the Army Corps level (Chef Air Marshal - General Oberst - General S.A.) called specifically General of the A.F. hierarchically subordinate to the Commander in Chief. The USAAF to support departments: Schools, Depots, Experimental Centers depended instead by Inspector General Aviation for the Army. The Naval Aviation was divided into units embarked on aircraft carriers or catapult aircraft -the Naval Forces And basic units on the ground to protect naval bases and naval strategic interest, which were respectively employed by the Unit Commanders naval or isles base (District), with the exception of the units located in defense of the Panama Canal, Hawaii and the Aleutians, the strategic long-range reconnaissance and the Marine Corps, who enjoyed special autonomy whilst coming under generally by Commander of the Fleet of US protection. Another exception was the aviation units of the U.S. Coast Guard administered by the Department of Finance but trained and supplied by the USNA for the flight material and equipment.

The air units were subdivided into: Flight representing the minimum amount with 8/10 aircraft each, Squadron (2/5 Flights), Groups (3/5 Squadrons), Wing (2/4 Groups), Air Division (5/8 Wings) Air Force (2/4 Air Divisions). The flight personnel (pilots), was composed mainly of officers and for the rest: navigators, gunners specialists, engine specialists, radio operators etc. by officers, NCOs and graded.[561]

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The didactic organization USAAF was divided on the voluntary recruitment of officers / complement student pilots (reserve) and on Officers appointment from regular courses of the Academy of West Point Military Personnel in S.P.E. The two branches were started at Randolph Field Preliminary Educational Center (Texas) who taught 500-600 students annually.

The course was started with the general pilot education (flight of basic school) for a period of 8 months divided into 2 the preparation and qualification cycles, followed by a course of specialization 4 months done to Kelly Field allocated for pilots the bombing, reconnaissance and fighter.

Subsequently pilots of the three specialties were enrolled in the school of tactical perfection of Maxwell Field for a course of nine months if intended for flight units, or at Chanute Field Technical School or aeronautical engineering from Wright Field when assigned as a specialist officers to units, or to the maintenance and overhaul of flight material.

The officer pilots enabled by the three schools of specialization/specialization, could access the State Higher School and the prepares initiated the War College for a course lasting one year.

Otherwise it proved the of the USNA articulation disposed on C.V. Squadrons of 4/6 of Fighters, Scouts, Torpedo Bombers, Bombers, while the naval aviation based on land, disposal of Wings for fighters and long-range reconnaissance and the USMC of assault, bombers, fighters, reconnaissance and transportation divided into squadrons with a consistency of 18/25 aircraft each.

The air defense was represented by regiments of the Army entered in Coastal Artillery and a battalion-level units and employed by G.U. regiments of the field (divisions and corps).

The flight material in service in 1939 amounted to 2,400 aircraft of the 1st line for the 2,500 Army and Navy (600 boarded more than 1,900 land-based) and a expansion program envisaged an increase of 5,000 airplanes for the USAAF and 3,000 for the USNA.

The in-service aircraft were numerous models some of which were outdated as the twin-engine bombers B.10 and B.12/B.18, the assault A.11/A.12 and A.18/A.19, the fighters P .26/P.29; instead the modern P.36/P.39 for fighters, light and heavy four-engine bombers A.20 B.12/B.24 still being evaluated. Several other models were experimentally evolving for mass production, and among these the fighters P.38, P.40, P.43, P.47 and the twin-engine medium bomber B.25. The Naval Aviation included the models SBD3 Douglas "Dauntless" bomber, by the fighter Grumman F4F "Wildcat", the old torpedo bomber Douglas TBD "Devastator", the maritime reconnaissance Consolidated PBY "Catalina" and the most handsome four-engine PBY.3 “Coronado”.

Other models do not fully accepted by the USA Armed forces were in production for England and Canada, and among these the A.35 “Vultee” for dive attack, Martin A.22/A.30 to better bombers known as "Maryland" and "Baltimore", the fighter Brewster F2A "Buffalo", the twin-engined Lockheed reconnaissance A.28 "Hudson."

The outbreak of the war in Europe had resulted in the launching of an aircraft production program by President Roosevelt, for 50,000 aircraft in 1940; there were some changes it is for the USAAF with establishment of its own operational G.S. and broader autonomy that went beyond the Army tactical support to arrive at strategic results, an increase of trained pilots expected to 12,000 men in 1941 and an expansion of groups to 84 flying units.

In December 1941, when Japan attacked the United States, the USAAF possessed 10,115 airplanes of all kinds which pulls 3,300 1st line and the remainder to support (school liaison, training, transport) while the USNA had 3,000 aircraft of the 1st line between board and base: on the ground and about as many for training, school, transport.

In 1940 it there was just over 6,000 military aircraft produced, of which about half were fighters and bombers, and nearly 40,000 aviation engines. The workforce of personnel ascended to more than 100,000 men, and about as many were those Naval Aviation.

The units stationed in the United States included in the spring of 1941: 7 Wings of heavy bombers and medium bombardment of 2, 3 wings (or wings) of light bombers, 9 Fighter Wings and one mixed (fighter-attack) divided between 4 Air Forces so subdivided and spread in places alongside as indicated:[562]

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1st A.F. - (Mitchell Field-N.Y.)
2nd – 4th Wings of heavy bombers (6 groups with 3 Sqd. Reconnaissance).
16th Wing of light bombers (2 groups and a Sqd. Command).

2nd A.F. – (Port George Wright-Wash)
20th Wing of heavy bombers (2 groups 1 - Sqd. Reconnaissance)
5th Wing medium bombers (3 Sqd groups. Reconnaissance)
11th Fighter Wing (2 groups -2 Sqd. Command).

3rd A.F. - (Tampa-Florida)
21st Wing of heavy bombers (2 groups -2 Sqd. Reconnaissance).
3rd Wing medium bombings (2 groups -2 Sqd. Reconnaissance).
17th Wing from light bombers (group 1 -2 Sqd. Reconnaissance).
8th Wing fighter. (4 groups).
22nd mixed Wing (4 groups -1 Sqd. Command).

4th A.F. - (Riverside-Calif.)
15th Wing from light bombers (2 groups -1 Sqd. Reconnaissance).
9th -10th Wings Fighters (4 groups -2 Sqd. Command).
1st Wing Heavy bomber (2 groups -2 Sqd. Reconnaissance).

Every Air Force was divided into Command, General Staff, Sqd. Command (6 twin-engine - 7 single-engine), Bomber Command, Fighter-Interceptor Command, aircraft - tactical collaboration Command, reconnaissance Sqd., Each Specialty command possessed a Sqd. - Command With 3-5 aircraft to bombers-Hunting (Bomber, interceptor-Pursuit Fighter, Tactical Support, Liaison, Transport).

Overseas Territory
Puerto Rico
1st mixed Wing (Bombing, reconnaissance, observation).
Hawaii islands
2 Wings (4 groups of bombers, fighters -1 Sqd. Reconnaissance).
Panama Canal Zone
2 Wings (3 groups of bomber, fighter).
Philippines
1 Sqd. bombing
1 Sqd. fighter
Alaska
1 Mixed group (3 Sqd. bombers -2 Sqd. fighter -1 Sqd. Command).

Units of Transportation
5 Groups (12 Sqd.).
School units
84 Sqd. School located in the following training courses:
(Fields Air School)
Barksdale –Louisiana
Brook –Texas
Maxwell –Alabama
Montgomery –Alabama
Scott –Illinois
Ellington –Illinois
Kelly –Texas
Randolph –Texas
Sant'Angelo –Texas
Lowry –Colorado
Chanute –Illinois
Reconnaissance-Observation
32 Sqd. assigned to G. U. of the Army - (S. U. Philippines Hawaii).
General Staff
3 Sqd. GS. (location Bolling Pield- Wash.D.C. -Fort Leavenworth-Texas).
1 Sqd. photographical (Maxwell Field -Bolling Field -Mitchell Fie1d).
1 Sqd. Communications (Barksdale Field).

The anti-aircraft artillery material included heavy A/A guns Hudson from 120/60 mod. Link Belt M.1, of 105/60 mod. M.1, from 90/50 mod. M.2, 76.2/52 mod. M.3. There were also automatic guns Hudson cm. 2.8, Oerlikon cm. 2. The heavy automatic weapons to fire A/A were the Browning machine gun 37/50 Mod. M.1A2 (or 40/56 -mod. Bofors M.5) and 12.7 M.M. Browning. (Washington Arsenal L.25/L.38 for the US. Navy).[563]

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The regiment was organized into 2 Bn. with 3 heavy batteries each (12 guns), 15 searchlights, 15 aerophones, 4 sighting and fire control radars, 12 light machine guns, 24 heavy machine guns.

The divisional A/A Battalion included 4 automatic cannon batteries with 24 pieces to 37 (or 40) and 12 12.7 machine guns were assigned to mechanized units.

The A/A defense Battalion for the protection of the bases it was armed with 3 batteries (12 guns from 76.2) and 48 machine guns cal. 12.7 M. M., 6 searchlights and 6: Radar.

The organization for territorial air defense of the United States included in 1941: 100 A/A Regiment, 18 A/A autonomous Battalion, 5 A/A Battalion for motorized divisions, 13 A/A Battalion for armored divisions for a total of 335 gun batteries and 540 machine guns assigned to the Army and 45 batteries of cannons and 60 machine guns served by the Navy. This then was the situation regarding the organization of the United States Air Force (Army and Navy) and the territorial air defense at the end of the year 1941 when America was also involved in the conflict and took side to side England against the Tripartite.

The USAAF commander in 1941 was Major General Henry Arnold, and the Chief of the G.S. Brig. Gen. Carl Spaatz, while the Inspector General was Brig. Gen. Herbert Dargne which also held the position of Assistant General of the Air Force for President Roosevelt.

USAAF other services included:

Div. A1 (Staff)

Div. A2 (Military Information Service)

Div. A3 (Operations-Training) Div. A4 (Materials-Services)

Div. Of War Plans

Sec. administrative

Sec. Statistics

THE JAPANESE IMPERIAL AIR FORCE

The Imperial Army Aviation employed by Army G.S., was divided into Air Divisions (Hikoshidan) each composed of two, three air brigades (Hikodan). Each brigade had 3, 4 regiments (Sentai) divided into groups (Sentai) and squadrons (Chutai). Subsequently divisions were grouped into Aerial Army (Kokugun).

Before the conflict the Air Force for the Army counted 36 reconnaissance squadrons for 297 aircraft with 350 -35 fighter planes and 15 bombers with 150 aircraft for a total of 797 specimens supplemented by other 850 aircraft of the 2nd line (or reserve).

The Aviation for the Imperial Navy had a different structure of which any organic entity was represented by group-called Kobutai -more groups constituted the Flotilla (Koku Sentai) and 2-3 Flotillas: formed the Naval Air Fleet (Koku Kantai).

The size of the units consisted of 600 reconnaissance flying boats and 400 aircraft embarked on the CVs.; another 1,000 planes made up the fleet reserve that it had 7 CV and 3 Seaplane tenders (AVs).[564]

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Chapter Twelve
Radio-electronic war in the Mediterranean

The radar in the Italian Air Force - The organization of O.B.S. sighting -The C.R.I.R.A. stations - The Roma Organization – Aviation Embarked on CVs.[565]

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Chapter Twelve
Radio-electric war
in the Mediterranean RADAR/CRIRA

THE ITALIAN AIR FORCE RADAR (of Ra.Ri. Radiolocalizzatori Activation)

The ambush Cape Matapan and analysis of the disaster suffered by the Italian Navy, supplied the technical bodies of the Supermarina confirm the presence on board of enemy ships a special device that can detect at a distance at night or in poor visibility conditions the presence of ships, the apparatuses known and implemented for some time in Italy as Radiolocalizzatori (R.T.D).

This conviction was sprung from the decryption of the Royal Navy's radio messages issued in the tragic night of March 28, 1941, and in particular those transmitted by D.D. "Stuart," which signaled Cunningham's flagship the presence of three suspicious ships distance 5 miles (km. 9,250), and those of the cruiser "Ajax" who had over taken the immobilized "Pola" at 3.5 miles (km. 6,500). The other Italian ships, then subsequently sunk, reached a short distance from the Mediterranean Fleet with the radar without being spotted (a Naval type 271) and were visually identified with common night optical devices. It was therefore evident that the sighting was made possible by devices able to see at night and at a considerable distance. Since that tragic day began the frantic race with time that was to bring to the Italian armed forces to climb the technological handicap not to be caught in a never so blatant conditions of inferiority to the M.F.

Already on 20 April Prof. Ugo Tiberio -which can be considered historically as the greatest Italian exponent in the field of radiolocalizzatori – presented to the authorities of the Supermarina his EC.3/Bis Radar upon wave of 70 cm. made in 1939 at the RIEC Livorno (Royal Institute of Electro-technical Communications), RDL that installed on the torpedo boat "Carini" for test, showed a naval reach of 12 km. and aerial reach of km. 34, then to the upper reaches of British naval radar model of the era, Admiralty Naval Type 271/286.

Simultaneously with the resumption of studies and experiments at the Navy, Germany began to deliver the first three De.Te type Fu.Mo.2 /40G (decimeter Telegraphen Funkmess Ortung Naval) conventionally called "Seetakt" (Sea Beater) and officially codified by the Italian Navy as De.Te.

It was a radar operating on 80 cm. wavelength with capacity up to 35/48 km., installed since 1938 on the pocket battleship "Admiral Graf Spee".[566]

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Unquestioned primacy of priorities in the naval field due to the Germanic Navy.

A first German De.Te. was installed on the D.D. "Legionnaire" for operational use, a exemplary of the EC.3/bis conventionally called "Owl" was instead experimentally mounted on "Littorio". A first order of 50 RDL now accepted by Supermarina was passed to SAFAR was activated while the technical radiolocalizzatori specialties (mechanics and operators) in the CREM schools.

But regardless of the initial steps taken by the Italian Navy, the Supreme Command now convinced of the need to employ the RDL in the Italian Armed Forces, created a special ad hoc body called Rari Committee (the definition Rari derived from the contraction of Radiolocalizzatori-Radiotelemetri with the use of the first two syllables and the last two) which had the task of coordinating the various initiatives to bring together into a common project result, studies and achievements that had to be examined by a special body called the Superior Technical Committee for electric facilities and military radio communications, before being finally approved the defined for the production implementation.

The Ra.Ri. Committee was chaired by Gen. of the Army Pietro Ago and the following members: Army. - Lt. Gen. Sacco and Mazzetti, Maj. Gen. Micheletta, Col. Scotti, Maj. Bartoloni, Navy. - Lt. Gen. A.N. Matteini, Maj. Gen. A.N. Ruelle, Capt. A.N. Bassoli. Air Force. - Gen. D.A. Cebrelli, Col. Vercelloni. The C.S.T. chaired by Prof. Giancarlo Vallauri was divided as follows: 1st Sec. Lt. Gen. Sacco, Gen. D.A. Oebrelli, Lt. Gen. A.N. Matteini, Maj. Gen. Micheletta, Maj. Gen. Ruelle, Console Gen. Fiaschi, Colonel Scotti, Col. AA. Vercelloni, Col. Rosponi, Col. Gari Marino, Cal. Celli, Col. Cappelli, Lt. Col. A.A. Padua, Capt. Frig. Caputo, Lt. Col. Mazzoni, Lt. Col., AA. Zuccoli, Lt. Col. A.N. Zannoni and Rajani, Lt. Col. Malerba, Maj. D'Agostino, Capt. Clementi, Capt. De Tivoli, Capt. Gari Toniello, Lt. Latmiral, 2nd. Lt. Baron.

They were the best military technical representatives selected by the specialized agencies of the Italian Armed Forces namely: Central Office Technician and Upper Management Study and Experience of the RA, Institute of Military Studies transmission, the Corps of Engineers and Artillery Technical Service of the Army, General Naval Engineers Directorate, Directorate General for Weapons and Naval Armaments, Directorate Technical Center of MACA and Anti-aircraft artillery inspectorate, and of course to qualified members of the G.S. of the Armed Forces

The second section was representative of a Industrial Technical Committee formed with representatives of the companies involved in the design, development and production of radiolocalizzatori comprising: Marelli, SAFAR, Allocchio Bacchini, Fivre, Galileo, Geloso, IMCA, Ducati, Microtecnica and with the participation of Eng. Castellani, Corradini, Vecchiacchi, Federici, Monti-Guarnieri, Boella, Recla, Rochat, Burgotti, Strada, Piatti, Majorana who worked in collaboration with the military engineers involved with the study of RDL devices and among these the Eng: Tiberius, Latmiral, Curcio , Montù, Pouget, Barzilai, Palieri, Niutta, Koch, Piccinini, Peroni, Serroni officers from the Navy, Army and Air Force.

In the summer of 1941, the R.A. particularly interested in the use of the Ra.Ri began to receive a first group of radar (Funkmess Gerat) of Germanic design and construction, obtained through the involvement of the Air Force attaché in Berlin Col. Teucci.

It was the Funkmess model 556/L40 “Loewe” of the Lorenz AG. who was working on frequency of 556 micro impulses-sec. with wavelength of 40 cm., power of 3000 Hz and carried to 60-80 km., RDL can be defined historically as the first radiolocalizzatore used by the RA. formed vertically on a base metal tower, the "Loewe" had two satellite dishes overlapping 2.40 m. in diameter (the other a receiver transmitter) and was essentially a search radar adaptable to A/A fire.

Ordered 10 copies of the model to replace "Wurzburg" Telefunken, not yet available, was delivered in version «Loewe» of the Soc. Lorenz for temporary unavailability of the most perfected Telefunken model, with priority assigned to establish a sighting Regiment of the Luftwaffe.

It was mostly for the Air Force G.S. to establish from scratch a new and revolutionary service for the Italian air force and it was necessary from the very beginning from scratch, establish a complete organization including: commands, units, aims to be pursued, theoretical and practical training of staff , specialized courses for technicians, operators and mechanics, creation of specialist teams, allocation and deployment of staff and equipment at the points established by the G.S.A, elaboration of doctrines. [567]

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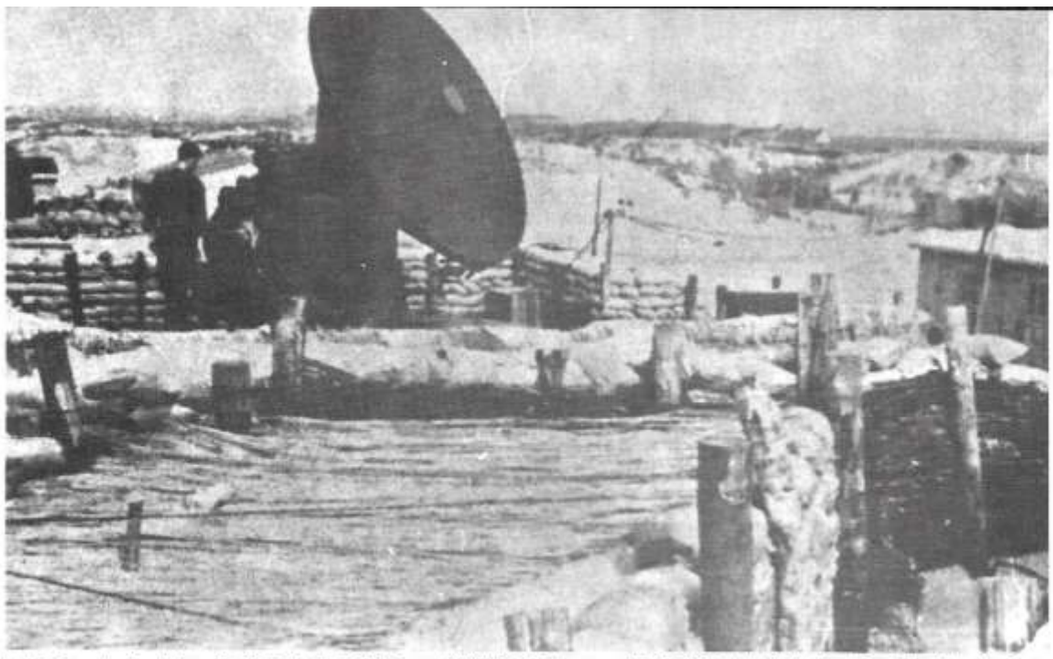

A "Wurzburg" radar deployed in Sicily by the I.G/Regiment 200. This Funkmess model (Fu MG 61 / A) had tasks of precision detection for guiding fighters and anti-aircraft shooting. It was also provided to the RA.

The first use of the new technological concepts and operational aspect were provided by Hpt. Dereser of the Flugmelde Dienst of LW (Sighting Service Aerial of the Germanic Air Force established since 1939), Hpt. Dereser heralded the planned program of education and the arrival in Italy of German specialists teams to be assigned to 10 RDL delivered to the RA, to carry out a joint service with Italian specialists.

There was formed a inter-force RDL school in Rome -Villa Baccelli -where assigned a L.40, four RDL went to the anti-aircraft artillery of the Nettunia school, 2 were placed in an experimental post - operative in Ostia Lido (Flying Boat Basin and Castel Fusano) for protection of Rome, three were stored awaiting assignment and utilization at the end of the first education cycle.

Since the Lorenz L.40 was considered a transitional RDL and *ab initio** education, pending delivery of the "Wurzburg", the G.S./RA made arrangements with the Germans for the education of staff at the Luftwaffe and, in collaboration with the other armed forces, constituted 10 mixed teams of students operators “W” (4 of RA, 3 Army, 3 Navy) that at the end of 1941 were sent to Germany to the Flak Artillery School III of Berlin-Heiligensee for a course of 6 weeks. The 4 teams of R.A. with 44 specialists of the Marconi radio-electricians categories and 2 interpreters under the command of Lt. Silvio Garrone and started education on January 5, 1942 prepared the future specialists for RDL, the G.S./RA began preparing tables of organization, processing of employment doctrines, technical manuals and repair of radiolocalizzatori, regular training of education courses to form teams of specialists, in view of the scale wide of use the of the RDL, expanded as well as the sighting , fighter guidance, A/A fire.

The small group of leaders appointed by the G.S.A included besides Gen. Cebrelli-head of Technical Center, as well as Col. Vercelloni and Lt. Col. Padua of the G.S. and Lieut. Col. Revetria Fighter interceptors Command, which intervened at the first Committee meeting of the Ra.RI. for the R.A. issued on December 30, 1941.

As a first measure was decided the division of the RDL service in two branches: precision distance sighting -guidance (or target shooting guidance for A/A) -The first aspect was to be completed with a longer range radar to have the necessary time to alarm the city, the fighter interceptor, the DICAT (a sighting detected at 100 km. involved a notice of 15'/25') and for this[568]

*Latin = from the beginning

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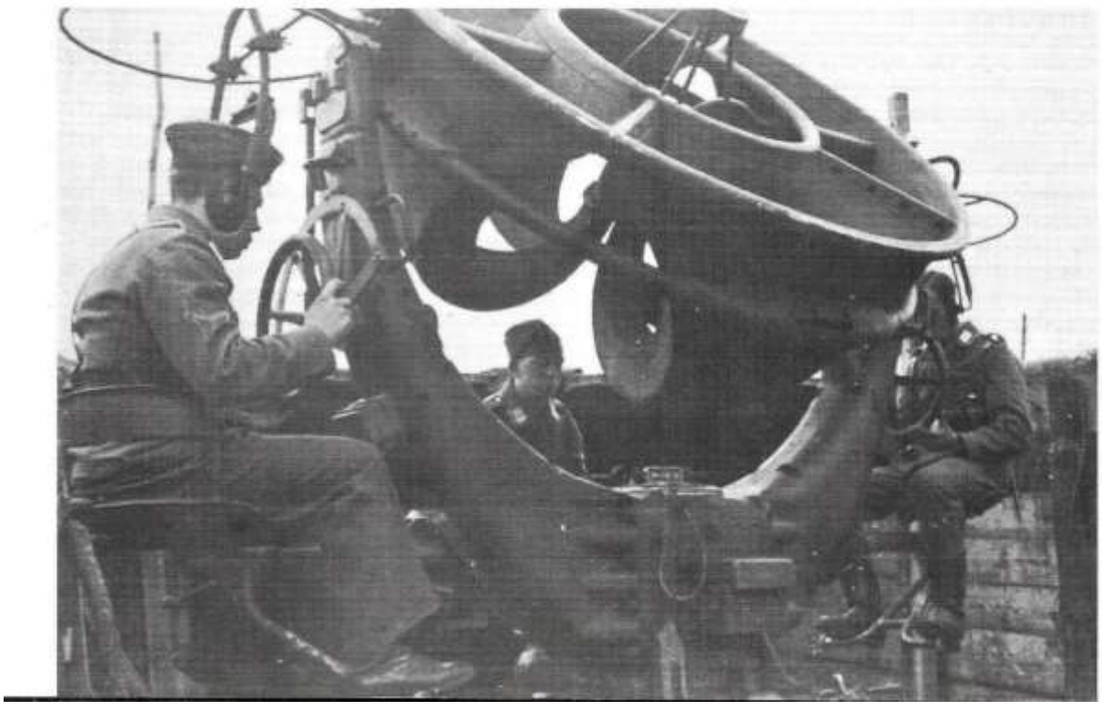
specific service was chosen the Funkmess "Freya" of the Gema (FM.40/G), which operated with 2.40 m. waves/500 microsecond pulses and optimal flow rate up to 150 km. fitted with a trellis with curtain of dipoles and flat reflector antenna, it received the conventional name of "Felino" from the initial F of "Freya", while the precision fighter guidance service the choice as mentioned, was based on FM.62/a “Wurzburg” with 51cm. wave, issue pace pulse of 4000 m/sec. and range up to 40-50 km. with a parabolic antenna fitted with a single dipole. It was conventionally called “Volpe" from the initial W “Wurzburg”. The two paired Funkmess worked and closely collaborated in the sighting - search and accurate target identification.

It had plans to set up a chain of "Freya" watch posts along the along the peninsula of about 300 km. one from the other, in order to fully cover the national territory and to avoid surprises. Trained in the meantime, the first teams of Fu.M.G. L.40 operators with the help of German specialists, it was decided to install the “Loewe” available that were located one at Tripoli (MM. 5108), one for the defense of Naples (MM.8503) and the third to that of Taranto (MM.8303).

But outside aid provided by Germany in instructional staff and equipment, the Italian Air Force did not want to give up for matters of pride and principle to achieve its radar, in the absolute conviction of the professional training of its technicians and their skills, having studies several interesting projects that can be summarized as follows: type A System (sighting) minimum reach 150 km. - exploration width from the -15° to +20° azimuth, zenith 30° on the floor; three reading devices, a closed control cabinet, small size for transport by rail or wheeled platforms, antenna curtain of dipoles operating on 360° with the movement is reversed, 3 operators per control panel (+2 readers per apparatus head), power with energy grid and generator.

Type B (Combat) increased from 30-50 km., Three reading devices (direction, distance, site), wavelength 50 cm., precision in distance 100 m. direction and located half a degree, closed cab of the mobile complex for rail transportation, tilting antenna spindle driving on 360°-95° azimuth elevation -5° in depression, 3 crew and a apparatus leader, power with power grid and generator.[569]

The Luftflotte 2 endowed by a Telecommunications and plane spotting Regt. (and airplane (LN / LG) implanted in Italian stations with acoustic detectors, radars, radio direction finders, services and radio. A acoustic detectors mod. Telefunken of LN / Rgt. 7th (Lt. Col Rosenkranz).



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The Air Force technical team belonging to DSSE of Guidonia adapt that the design guidelines of the G.S.A - was entrusted with the Directive and professional responsibility of Col. GARI Marino Algeri which selected a group of officers including skilled GARI engineers Montuschi, Curcio, Barzilai , Niutta, Piccinini, Kock and Peroni which was given the task of designing a collegial sighting apparatus type a that having certain service features and exterior similar to Freya was conventionally called "Argo."

The SAFAR was planning an RDL for the anti-aircraft fire designed by Eng. Castellani and referred to as "Veltro", the Marelli proposed his RDL "Lince" with characteristics, which similar to the "Veltro" designed by Eng. Vecchiacchi, later abandoned, not to interfere in the production of "Veltro" of higher characteristics, targeting the service needs of the Army.

The Navy perfected at RIEC the "Gufo" in the EC.3/Ter. version with satellite dish (mod. G. III) and curtain ("Folaga-RIEC), a copy of which was handed over to the Air Force for transformation into specific service of sighting distance of the plane function (mod. "Folaga-Guidonia").

The Army's contribution was provided by I.M.S.T., the engineer who created the anti-radar system called mod. A.F. "Caruso" designed by Eng. Gaetano Latmiral officer of Engineers, as well as a device for the detection of radio wave emissions at a range (useful for the presence of enemies depending on radar) that was assigned in production at the Geloso Corporation.

At the end of 1941 the radar problem in the Italian armed forces had made considerable progress, sensitized commands, military technical institutions, specialized companies in the field of radio-electric, the design workshops and was a huge financial and productive effort was activated to cut time, to make up for lost technology gap, to eliminate the operational handicap, creating from scratch a doctrinaire thinking and concepts of employment, preparing cadres and specialized personnel.

The DSSE of Guidonia - radio technical Division - employed in various projects, the realization of "Argo" and in aircraft modification of the "Folaga", had assigned technical team to select specific tasks as follows: Capt. GARI Arnaldo Piccinini - supervision the design of the RDL and the transmitting - Capt. Ascanio Niutta - apparatus of reception - Lt. Giorgio Barzilai - Systems radiating - Capt. Serroni - oscillographic device - Lt. Valota - electromechanical facilities - Lt. Dispes – servomechanism - Lt. Dell'Aira - accessories and mechanical functionality - Other talented contributors assisted to the success of the project. The results would not have been lacking!

THE ORGANIZATION OF SIGHTING O.B.S.

The presence of the Luftwaffe in the Mediterranean at first with the X CAT and later with the Luftflotte 2, the subsequent OBS establishment and its organization of technical and operational command, behaved by sending special sighting units drawn from regiments of broadcasting of the Luftwaffe (Luftnachrichten Regt.) abbreviated in German military terminology Ln. Regt., structured with 4 Battalions with telephone operators, radio transceivers, radio interceptors and signalers, assistance and security to the flight, demolitions unit.

As from 1940 each Ln. Rgt. had a sighting-telecommunications company for the use of Funkmess called Flugmelde Cp. (Lg. KPN.) then ordered at the level of battalion and then even Regiment. (Lg. Rgt.) when the sighting organization was greatly expanded and extended from Norway to the Mediterranean from Libya to the eastern front, from the Atlantic coast to the Black Sea.

The first sightings unit (Ln. KPN. Afrika) commanded by Major Rubke, arrived in Italy in September 1941 and soon after was transferred to North Africa available to the Fl. Fu. Afrika.

At the end of 1941 they reached more specifically specialized units, taken from Lg. Rgt. 32 newly established it was constituted with the previous Ln. KPN., 1st Lg. Btl. (Maj. Lehmcke) joined organically to Ln. Rgt. 7, to be allotted to the needs of DAK in command of Lt. Col. Rosenkranz.[570]

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Each Flugmelde company had three radars for sighting-fighter guidance: 1 Fu.MG.40/G. “Freya” and 2 Fu.MG.62/B “Wurzburg”. The first motorized aircraft sightings company (Lg.Kpn. Mot.) under the command Lt. Enringimann was stationed in Derna (Ras el Tin area) to prevent in advance further surprises by the WDAF, in raids on fields of area (Martuba, El Fteiah, Apollonia, Maraua, Barce, Benina, Berka and mainly the port of Benghazi).

Even by the Axis began to improve with the use of the first RDL - defensive the organization, to fill the radio-electric handicap and cope more adequately the corresponding English sighting organization in function at the time.

In November the Ln.Kpn. Afrika ceded under the command of the 5th Air Fleet a "Freya" (MM./F.286) to be allocated to DICAT of Benghazi, and the command of the Air Fleet who had trained with the help of German a first team specialists - to operators, entrusted the "Felino" the radio operator Sgt. Tullio Gallitto, which historically has the merit of having activated for the Italian Air Force the revolutionary service of plane spotting with radar. As he slowly put in motion the new organization for the Italian Armed Forces, the Supreme Command issuing an interesting service Directive, to all the Armed Forces, to lay the foundations for inter-organization with the purpose of unifying studies, projects, educational institutions, technical materials, operations units for territorial air defense avoiding unnecessary dualisms, dispersion of forces and materials, to convey employment doctrines and instructional methods in a single educational system that represents the best in preparation and renewal of territorial air defense to realize also with standard artillery material. Institutions interested in the new organization, grouped and coordinated by 1st Air Defense Div. of the Supreme Command, included:

SUPREME COMMAND -I. Dept. - Organization – Training Office
Operations office
Technical office
Communications office
Army G.S
VI. Dept. - Anti-aircraft defense Office - Aerial Sighting- Alarm Office
Operations Office
Organization– Training. Office
2nd Div. Terrestrial Defense – Labor and materials A/A defense
Inspectorate of Army Engineers
Inspectorate of Artillery Weapon
Technical Service Engineers and Artillery

G.S/R.N.
VI Dept. - Maritime anti-aircraft Defense Office - I.T.E. - Office B.D. - Office E
Gen. Dir. Weapons and Naval Armaments
General Milmart command
Technical Center Militia Maritime Artillery

G.S./RA
I. Dept. Operations - Office E
II. Dept. -1st Div. Ord.-Add.
VIII. Dept. -1st Div. Air Defense – 2nd Div. Terrestrial Defense
IV. Dept. - Div. Air Defense - Links-Sightings
Gen. Dir. Military Personnel
Telecommunications Inspectorate- flight Support Div. Radio links
Aeronautical Engineers Inspectorate –Aeronautical Production Inspectorate
G.S./MACA
Technical Center Militia anti-aircraft Artillery
Off. Ord.- Add.
Office A/A Materials
War production

* * *

In the same year the Supreme Command responding to the requirements received from many quarters, and particularly by G.S. Luftwaffe to unify, coordinate and rationalize the air defense of the metropolitan area, this thesis put forward on several occasions, even by German authorities including the same Marshal Goering, was - a study commission to examine the problem and propose a solution that would take account of the situation existing at the various armed forces, the particular needs of each, the location of the defenses and the analysis of available material, the various instructional and educational criteria.[571]

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It was a very important and challenging task that was already addressed before the war but had found lively resistance and jealousies between the various armed forces, to the point that a valuable study prepared by Gen. Mario Ajmone Cat on behalf of the Air Force General Staff, to unify DICAT under the auspices and responsibility of the Air Force, had been strongly opposed and rejected the opposition by the G.S./Army and particularly Marshal Graziani.

The results in the first year of the war could not be considered in DICAT certainly encouraging because it had proved technical preparation of personnel inadequate, poor training, poor quality of the heterogeneous available artillery material, dysfunction for backwardness of watch-identification methods, lack collaboration between DICAT and Air Force and the other Armed Forces.

The advent of radar for sighting distance, opened up many new application and necessarily demanded a radical transformation of the whole defensive organization.

This aspect of great importance had been fully transposed by the Chief of the G.S.G Gen. Cavallero, and the establishment of the committee was the first encouraging step to change on paper the whole DICAT organization. In this transformation a part of great importance and participation had been reserved for the Air Force, which for its part had addressed the problem entrusting it to Col. Silvio Napoli of the G.S.

THE C.R.I.R.A. STATIONS
(Radio Interceptions Center of the Royal Air Force)

In 1941, the SIA had greatly developed its organization, its organic, its technical equipment and radio and under the constant and intelligent guidance of Gen. Scagliotti, many important advances had been made and many difficulties overcome.

The radio interception problem of the messages aired by the British, was properly set and excellent results were obtained in this specific Aeronautical Information Service sector.

The main radio station used for interception of enemy emissions, was at Guidonia-Valle Inviolata with powerful receiving devices, operating on different wavebands and mostly on short wave.

Several listening posts with specialized personnel were installed on the metropolitan and essentially in the southern Italian territory using receiving equipment type SAFAR 850/A (cm waves from 14.3 to 250 meters) and Marconi AR.5 (c./m waves. of 21 m. at 1800).

To this add after some radio jamming stations installed between Lampedusa and Pantelleria and Sicily to blind the beacon of Malta, disrupt radio communications, and, to put a series of radio signals similar to mislead the planes approaching Malta.

In Pantelleria it was also installed a radio direction finder to locate RAF planes sailing to Malta and provide useful guidance for fighter interceptors in collaboration with other R.G. station located at Monte Erice (Trapani) necessary for radio direction finder triangulation with radio-telephone link via radio link. The apparatuses included the R.G.E.939/N shortwave (HF) connected to a radio interception station operating in HF.

He began from that time electronic warfare to disorient the enemy, find out ahead of his intentions, and prevent his surprises. It was formed in 1941 in Sicily on Mount Pellegrino overlooking Palermo, the first CRIRA center, whose perfect location had been reported by the radio services of the Luftwaffe who had implanted near Syracuse a Freya radar for a sighting, made transmission tests and radio interception, ascertained the location of favorable locations for broadcasting from Malta and the Mediterranean in general.

In collaboration with CRIRA of Monte Pellegrino it was activated a R.I.C. (Radio Interception links) section of the SIA. The designated operator for CRIRA was radio operator S.M. Ferdinand Barduro, a perfect expert, an specialist connoisseur of the English language, then moved to the dependencies of Lt. GARI Mario Jung appointed meanwhile in charge of CRIRA n. 1.[572]

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It was enough a few months of work to draft a conventional glossary on the most frequent words used by the RAF/Malta, find patiently for each of its proper meaning, immediately interpret the meaning of a sentence and take appropriate decisions. Before the end of 1941 the CRIRA center n. 1 had been strengthened with 4 other operators that allowed the continuous listening 24 hours with 24 4-hour shifts.

Between June 1940 and December 1941 several British aircraft were deceived by erroneous indications of direction and landed between Pantelleria and Sicily being captured intact or damaged. The most important prey was undoubtedly the Air Marshall Boyd Owen Tudor captured aboard a Wellington landed near Capo Passero, carrying five crew members (a major, a captain, two lieutenants and a sergeant). They were found on board ciphers, codes and tables to radio communications. The most important discovery came in August in Calabria, near Crotone, when a Blenheim hit by flak carried out a forced landing at Cape Colonna and the crew was captured.

The factory new bomber came from Gibraltar and was bound for Malta after deviation in the Gulf of Taranto for visual control of the situation at sea.

From Rome DSSE was sent Capt. GARI Dante Curcio under "war loot", which take away all of the instruments on board including a strange device called Receiver 3002, protected by a mechanism of self-destruction to use in case of abandonment aircraft, but that in this occasion was obviously not been put into operation.

The interments were moved to Guidonia near the DSSE, where Capt. Curcio made sure that the 3002 Receiver was not a radio receiver, since it possessed three wavebands VHF (1.5/3/6 m.) with switch to change frequency and was actually an IFF apparatus (mod. SCR. 522.) produced in the US on the English project, and served for remote recognition called friend-foe long in use by the RAF.

The operation was very simple because the IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) board, received a pulse and ground control radar on a well-specified wavelength into force in the day, and responded automatically with a pulse that strengthened appeared on the radar screen with a "whisker" flickering light that provided certainty about the identity of the aircraft. In the absence of flicker it was to argue that the aircraft "approached" had not responded and had to be considered "non-friend."

There was initiated studies to provide similar recognition apparatus also for Italian aircraft, whereas some time even the Luftwaffe had such identification device called conventionally "Steinziger" (wandering stone) and technically was. G.25 (Fiunk Gerate mod. 25), a number of which were required to be installed on Italian Air Force aircraft.

New prospects opened to start from 1941 Italian air force that tried timidly to take in a world remained until that mysterious moment, precluded the most revolutionary in its approach, in its conceptual philosophy, in his explication practice, restricted to "insiders" since to late in the war is still thought simplistically, that the conceptions of use of the Force Aerial tactics were based on the operation of the airplane which carrier to achieve the goal and the offensive capabilities to strike effectively with bombs, torpedoes, weapons onboard.

The poor diffusion of radio on board of the aircraft especially fighters, the absence of radio telephone for VHF/HF communications between ground and aircraft, the ingratitude of the radar, IFF, the G.C.I. fighter guidance, the radar for night fighters and for sighting at sea, at night or in poor visibility, were a number of serious technological and operational handicap that ultimately favored the enemy, facilitated its interventions, altered in his favor the classic look, but traditional exceeded the air war.

ROMA ORGANIZATION – EMBARKED CV AVIATION

The disastrous outcome of the operation "Gaudo" of March 1941 which led to the destruction of the ship of the 1st Div. in the waters of Cape Matapan, had as immediate consequence the implementation of two important decisions:

1) The resumption of studies on radar interrupted since 1939 (see section on RDL).

2) The aircraft carriers preparation to ensure the necessary aviation support to the Battle Fleet in future naval operations.[573]

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These provisions were intended to belatedly remedy the errors in forecasting made by the Regia Marina G.S. between the 1930s and 1940s, regarding the importance that aircraft carriers would have in future wars - even in the narrow Mediterranean basin - when battleships would find themselves outside the range of fighter aircraft and would have to resolve all problems relating to defence on their own, or, if necessary, carry out offensive actions with the support of aviation.

The reasons behind these incorrect predictions are varied and if the Navy arrived at the threshold of the conflict- without CV since there should not be much enemy Air Force (in 1929 the Italian Navy had been refused the construction of 60,000 gross tonnage of CV), because of the mistaken belief of invulnerability of the B.B. and the modest belief of necessity, manifested more to the principle that requirement by G.S./Navy, the fleet in the presence of at least a CV., and the numerous allegations made in this regard by the most qualified representatives of the Navy, even on the eve of the war, including the Chief of Staff Adm. Domenico Cavagnari and Deputy Sansonetti, that on several occasions they underestimated the importance of the CV.

In March 1941, Mussolini broke the deadlock on this issue and to prepare immediately ordered aircraft carriers and Navy suggested to save time and money, to promptly turn two passengers ships available and not used during the war, the "Augustus" 30,317 GRT. renamed "Sparviero" and "Roma" 30.187 TSL. called "Aquila."

By this decision and by the technical and operational collaboration that would follow between the Navy and Air Force for use of CV., born conventionally "The Roma Organization" abbreviated simply in O.R. the name assigned to an aircraft carrier.

The conversion work began immediately at Genoa, and projected a flight deck along 217x26 m. wide, the installation of two elevators and two steam catapults, a max speed. about 30 knots (55 km/h), a range of 5500 miles, an armament consists of 8 - 135/45 A/A guns, 12 of 65/54, 132 - 20/65 machine guns an respectable antiaircraft armament and among the most powerful in the world. The air component envisaged a maximum of 36 aircraft (theoretically 50) between fighters, fighter-bombers - scouts, some of which hung with hooks to the ceiling Hangars to buy more space. The "Aquila" with "control island" right hand and unique smokestack, had an apparatus (engine capable of delivering 140,000 HP of power and was expected to adoption of "Gufo" RDL for navigation and distance-sighting. With no protection but it was all the more vulnerable it represented what the emergence of war and the lack of foresight of peace had devised to address and attempt to solve the serious problem, although under the strategic aspect would not have arisen important innovations and would be modest the advantages operationally.

Still it had some validity in the general context of naval warfare in the Mediterranean. Prepared to the extent of 90% at the time of the armistice will not ever use in the war and will be sunk at the end of the conflict in Genoa by men of the same Italian Navy. For the part of the Air Force responsibility, the G.S. designated types of aircraft they could find employment on board the CV and among these the Re.2001 in constructive O.R. versions as catapult capable fighter and fighter-bomber with ventral hook bomb racks (up to 250 kg), alternatively with Fiat G.50 Bis/A. (Assault) in the fighter-bomber version, assault and G.50 Bis N.A. (Ship Assault), the Re.2003 as a naval reconnaissance plane, the G.50 Bis/N. for training - naval reconnaissance.

All aircraft designated to the CV were provided with hook arrest, special padded head restraints and harnesses to cushion the repercussions landing led stop with elastic straps.

Simultaneously with the beginning of the preliminary organizational work, the G.S./RA began the preparation of flight personnel assigned to the O.R. setting up a special equipment on the airport of Orvieto-Castelviscardo, then transferred to the field of Perugia-S. Egidio, consisting of a landing-takeoff area of standard measures such as the size of the "Aquila" flight deck, as was ordered in Germany landing equipment from the Demag corporation already installed on CV. "Graf Zeppelin", to simulate the real landing-takeoff conditions with elastic straps, electric brake and steam catapults and then train personnel to the actual situation of the CV.[574]

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A Mixed Commission composed of German technicians Eng. Post and Ruev, by Capt. GARI Fridolin Mayer together with representatives of the Italian Navy, was collaborating in the solution of different problems. For specific hook training at Demag the GS/RA ordered from the RLM 6 Arado.196 aircraft.[575]

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The activity of C.I.A.F.
In France -In North Africa

The C.I.A.F. – The de Gaullist Air Force[576]

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The activity of C.I.AF.
In France - In North Africa

THE C.I.A.F.
(The work of the Air Force Subcommittee)

Once the difficult post-armistice period had been overcome with understanding and collaboration from the Italians and French, the work of the CIAF in 1941 was aimed at further improving relations with the Vichy French authorities who had appreciated the work of the Axis in Syria, encouraging the influx of French aircraft sent as reinforcements to the protectorate, the decision to increase anti-aircraft defences in the metropolitan territories and in North Africa to better deal with the frequent territorial violations of the RAF.

There had been a sharp break between the Vichy government and the de Gaullist movement, and the fighting that occurred in Syria between French of opposite tendencies were proof of this changing attitude of hostility. There remained rooted and it was absurd to deny it, strong resistance against the Axis, especially in northern Africa, and particularly acrimonious were the relations with the Italian authorities to the problems of the armistice conditions and service relations solution with the general belief always highlighted most of the serious political strategic and military mistake of agreeing to an armistice too benevolent while operating in those unfavorable psychological and operating conditions in potentially hostile areas.

At the end of 1941 was more aggravated the shipping crisis between Italy and Libya, and this was one of the most disastrous consequences of navigation of convoys on the most onerous and dangerous current route outside the Tunisian territorial waters. In January 1941 they were attacked and injured in Algiers Gen. Boselli and Maj. Coletti of the CIAF, attacked by a xenophobic mob that had recognized them as Italian officers.

There was an official apology from the French authorities but the episode was indicative of the mood and the anti- Italian venom by certain French extremist groups.

The influence of the USA on the Vichy government was decisive in that period in not granting aid to the Axis. Instead, an increase in the DCA in the Marseille-Toulon sector was granted by the CIAF for the protection of the war industries in the area including gunpowder factories, torpedo factories, munitions factories, artillery shells, refineries, fuel and lubricant depots, airports and naval bases.[577]

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Will it come to pass to a more suitable distribution of AA batteries on the coast, to the establishment of watch companies divided into peripheral posts equipped with Aufiere mod. Acoustic detectors, defensive sectors for collecting information, communications centers, places of alerting DAT and interceptors units.

The new DCA defense system according to CIAF agreements included:

	Batt. a.q.	Batt. m.q	Batt. b.q. (Single weapons.)
Croix Farou	4	-	2
Cap Brun	4	-	2
Gres Ban	-	-	21
Hyeres	2	-	4
Les Salins	2	-	4
La Laguette	-	-	12
Marseille	4	-	2
Montredou	4	-	2
Le Luc	-	4	14
Cap Cepet	4	-	2
Peyras	4	-	2
Six Fours	4	-	2
Saint Antoine	4	-	2
Saint Marthre	4	-	2
Ratonneau	-	4	2
La Mandrague	-	4	16
Berre	-	-	2
Vai ode Richard	4	-	2
Les Baisses	4	-	12
Marignane	2	-	4
Port de Bone	-	4	2
Anse d'Aguille	-	-	12
Istres	-	4	26
Port Saint Louis	2	-	4
Fort Saint Priest	2	-	4
Parilly	2	-	4
Bron	-	-	12
St. Jean de Dieu	-	-	3
Total	44 Batteries (176 pieces from 90/50)	44 Batteries (176 pieces from 75/60)	166 Single Weapons (Cal. 13.2 - 25/37)

Models

Schneider cannon from 90/50 mod. 26/31/32
Schneider cannon from 75/60 mod. 28/33
Auto cannons CAD.CAS.CAQ of 25/70 and 37/40 mod. 25/38/39 CAS and 13.2.

The air forces also underwent a transformation that brought to a total of aircraft to 1,100 of all types and specialties divided as follows:

Metropolitan France	n. 386
Tunisia	n. 92
Algeria	n. 207
Morocco	n. 183
West Africa	n. 138
Indochina	n. 59
Madagascar	n. 21
Antilles	n. 7
Somalia	n. 7

To the total of 1100 aircraft of the 1st line were added another 550 aircraft between schools, passengers, connections, aid, technical support which brought the total of authorized French aircraft to 1650 copies - quite a remarkable number for a defeated country and regime under controlled armistice. But the French claims are not exhausted in the presentation continues and requesting of new concessions: the request of other air units for the North Africa, new technical infrastructure, expansion of technical services, replacement of flight material with more modern, higher service autonomy, increase in hours for training and organic, transfer of new aircraft in Syria. But while on the one hand the authorities of Vichy demanded and not infrequently obtained new permits by the CIAF, on the other barricaded behind stubbornly alleged breaches of neutrality to Italian requests to facilitate the transit of ships in Tunisian waters or refuel aircraft directed to E.A., by opposing and reply with loopholes and open provocations every aspect, even elementary, of mutual collaboration. Italy sought to promote in every way the French demands allowing transit on its airports aircraft directed to Syria (Puglia and Aegean), refueling units in transit and providing them the necessary technical assistance on the ground and in flight without obtaining appropriate counterparts in return.[578]

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Aulnat Airport (Vichy) 05/28/1941 - The Maresciallo Philippe Petain inspects a hunting group departing for Syria threatened by British and degollisti troops. The planes are Bloch MB.152 with speed of 515 Km/h.

The CIAF/Provence began in 1941 to set aside the aircraft and the new production engines distributing them as follows:

Montpellier - D.520
Lyon - Le.O.45
Clermont Ferrand - Bloch 175-1716
Chatearoux - Caudron C.445
Hyères - Loire-Nieuport 40
Berre - Loire -130/Laté-298/Breguet 730
Limoges - Engines R.60/G.R. 14/N
Pau - Engines N.S. 12/X and H.S. 12/Y

The aircraft of North Africa were recovered and set aside in storage at Casablanca (essentially Amiot 351/354). It was perfected the traffic between mainland France and N.A.F. in exchange for facilitation of traffic to Germany to Libya, agreements specified in the conversations of the Wiesbaden conference obtained in return an increase of French merchant shipping in the Mediterranean. Metropolitan Air Force in 1941 were divided as follows: [579]

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METROPOLITAN FRANCE
ARMY AIR – General Staff South Sector (Aix en Provence)

Istres	6th Regt. Grp.	1/2	Le.O45	9
	Bombing Grp.	1/31	Le.O45	9
		1/38	Le.O45	13
	Regt. Grp 1/15	2/38	Le.O45	11
	transportation Grp.	1/15	Farman-Amiot	29
		3/15	Amiot 143	-
Avignon	6th Regt. Grp.			
	Reconnaissance Grp.	2/14	Potez 63/11	12
Salon	22nd Regt. Grp.			
	Fighter Grp.	3/9	Bloch 152	24
Le Luc		2/1	Bloch 152	26
Marignane		2/8	Bloch 152	26
Nimes	Sqd.	1/13	Potez 631	8
	General Staff sub-sector South (Montpellier)			
Lezignan	18th Regt. Grp.			
	Assault Grp.	1/51	Breguet 693	11
		1/54	Breguet 693	12
Montpellier	Fighter Grp.	1/8	Bloch 152	25
	Reconnaissance Grp.	2/22	Potez 63/11	12
Perpignano		1/14	Potez 63/11	12
Lyon	Fighter Grp.	1/1	Bloch 152	26
Clermond-Ferrand		2/9	Bloch 152	26
Chateauroux		1/2	D.520	26

Naval Aviation

Berre	6th Flotilla			
	Torpedo bombers -Sqd.	3/T	Laté 298	10
		4/T	Laté 298	10
	Reconnaissance -Sqd.	9/E	Breguet	5
			Le.O.246	1
				343
			Reserve	9
			Total	352

The restructuring of the armed forces in N.A.F. was thus regulated:

TUNISIA	*D.A.T.* (Tunis-Bizerte)
3 Inf. Battalion.	412th Regt.Group. D.C.A.
4 Art. Grp.	2 Co. Plane spotting
9 Brigade of Gendarmerie	12 A/A Bty. (40 pieces to 105/50 and 75/60, 68 weapons from 25/70 and 37/40)
8 Police Commissariats	
5 Stations Police Auxiliary	3 Bty. Spotlight
	D.C.A. - Marine Nationiale –Biserta[580]

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ALGERIA	D.A.T. (Algiers, Philippeville, Bona, Oran)
8 Inf. Battalion	411th Regt. Group. D.C.A.
4 Art. Grp.	2 Cp. plane sighting
10 brigades of the Gendarmerie	22 A/A Bty. (72 pieces of 90/50 and 75/60, 42 weapons
Southern Territories (Sahara)	of 25/70 and 37/40)
9 Saharan Cp.	3 Bty. Spotlight

LOCATION AIR FORCE -N.A.F.

ARMY AIR (Algeria)

Maison Banche	26th Regt. Group.	Fighter Grp.	2/3	D.520	26
			3/6	D.520	25
Blida		Bombing Grp.	1/19	DB.7	13
			2/61	DB.7	13
Setif		Transport	2/15	Farman-Potez	11
		Reconnaissance	1/36	Potez 63/11	13
Oran	3rd Regt. Group.	Bombing	1/11	Le.O.45	13
		Fighter	3/3	D.520	23
		Reconnaissance	2/52	Bloch 175	12
NAVAL AIR FORCE					
Arzew	5th Flotilla	Torpedo bombers	1/T	Laté 298	7
			2/T	Laté 298	6
Blida		Reconnaissance	4/BR	Potez 63/11	6
Lartigue	1st Flotilla	Fighter	1/AC	D.520	13
			2/AC	D.520	12
	1st Flotilla	Bombing	6/B	Le.O.45	3
			7/B	Le.O.45	4
					199
				Reserve	7
				Total	206

ARMY AIR (Tunisia)

El Aouina	8th Regt. Group	Bombing Grp.	1/25	Le.O.45	13
			2/25	Le.O.45	13
		Reconnaissance Grp.	2/33	Bloch 174	13
WEST AFRICA					
Onakam, Thies, Bamako		1/6	GC. 1/4 H.75		12
			GB. 11/62 DB.7		24
SYRIA					
Rayak, Damascus			GC. 1/7 Le.O.45		27
			GB.l/39 Potez 63/11		12
Sidi Ahmed		Fighter Grp. 2/7	GR. 11/39 D.520		25[581]

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Gabes	Fighter Sqd.	3/13	Potez 631	8
Naval Aviation				
Karouba	Reconnaissance Sqd.	1/E	Breguet Biserte	3
			Le.O.257	3
				78

In Corsica were 20 aircraft divided among fighters, bombers, reconnaissance, school, spread between the airfields of Aspretto, Campo dell'Oro, Calvi and Borgo.

In Syria was established a training section on the airport of Rayak as before in N.A.F. at Blida.

More important is the decision to resume production of aircraft determined in the 9 April 1941 meeting at Torino, originally set in 3000 aircraft and 6,000 engines with the commitment that 1/5 of production was assigned to the aviation needs of this opinion not shared by Gen. Lodi of the S.R.A., who was rightly pointed to German colleagues, the increased aerial potential found quickly by CIAF for the defeat French Air Force.

The Germans got the lion's share in French aeronautical supplies, thought should not antagonize cooperation and industrial policy of Vichy France and anyway favored granting.

Other measures adopted to facilitate the optical identification was to apply showy directional yellow-red horizontal bands to the rudder and engine hood to avoid painful misunderstandings occurred previously. On August 13 French planes intercepted on Biserta a English twin engine dropping leaflets and shot it down. Was authorized the resumption of piloting schools the allocation of about 200 aircraft and were initiated school courses qualifying A/A artillery staff.

The end of the fighting in Syria meant the return of the Italian CIAF staff under the command of Col. Bardella and the exodus of what remained of the Vichy flight units sent as reinforcement through Italy; were lost 179 aircraft on 300 who took part in the campaign.

In the operations in Syria participated in the following units:

Fighter GC. 1/7, III/6, II/3 and 1AC naval aviation.

Bombing GB.I/39, I/31, 1/12, 1/25 and naval aviation units E3/39, E6/B, E7/B, T.1.

The transport groups GT. I/15, II/15, GM.38.

Aerial Observation GAO. 592-593-594-595-596 - I/583, GR.II/39 and E19/S of the Navy.

Were lost 44 fighters, 37 bombers, 24 reconnaissance aircraft, and 10 transports. Anther 12 aircraft were damaged in transfer flights. Despite the serious difficulties encountered in the Anglo-de Gaullist attack on Syria, the French aviation had fought with such courage and determination to arouse approval and recognition from Axis.

A proof, if any were needed, that at this particular time due to reasons of war, France of Marshal Petain was favorable to the Axis.

In November 1941 was also occupied the French coast of Somalia and Djibouti by the British and de Gaullist.

The split time Franco-German aircraft program production between 1941-43 for the construction of about 3,400 aircraft and 8,000 engines as follows:

Ju.52	n. 209	Potez 63	n. 67
Ar.196	n. 102	Bloch 175	n. 249
Do.24	n. 73	Caudron 445	n. 707
Do.26	n. 15	M.S.230	n. 18
		D.520	n. 550
Fw.189	n. 407	Le.O.45	n. 225
Me.l08	n. 166	Loire	n. 20
Si.204	n. 203	LN.40	n. 20
Fi.156	n. 305	Laté 289	n. 50
	n. 1,680		n. 1,906

They were involved in the SNCA program -St. Nazaire, Bordeaux, Satroville Bourges and the SNCA Le Moreaux, La Morane- Bouguenais, Amiot-Puteaux, Caudron-Paris.[582]

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Engines	
R.6Q10/11	n. 1,890
AS.411	n. 615
G.R.14 N/48-49	n. 1,425
H.S.12 Y/45-49	n. 900
H.S.12X	n. 60
G.R.14/04-05	n. 785
B.M.W. 132/T	n. 2,495
	n. 8,170

It was also agreed upon the right for Lufthansa to hire or buy in France individual aircraft engines and up to 50% of the French availability, to meet civil aviation experiences for exploitation in common with Air France, participating in the construction of the following experimental aircraft:

2 SE.200 transatlantic flying boat
2 Laté 631 transatlantic flying boat
2 SE.800 twin-engine 24 seats
2 Breguet 500 twin-engine 24-seat
2 SO.30 twin-engine to 24 seats
1 Bloch 800 aircraft postal
2 SE.700 Postal auto-gyros

The Subcommittee of the Regia Aeronautica chaired first by Gen. S.A. Mazzucco Renato then replaced by Gen. Tacchini, had reduced to two delegations for the N.A.F. the unit of the R.A. respectively assigned to Gen. Biagini (Tunisia) and the General Stanzani (Algeria and Morocco) with two sub-delegations in Algiers (Lt. Col. Mario Tonti) and Grano (Maj. Felix Baldeschi) supported by a flight control section entrusted to Col. Pietrangelo Antonini.

For Tunisia the Air Force delegation was assigned to Col. Fortunato Rolando assisted by Capt. Filippo Rossi. In 1941 there were 33 cases of landings of Italian airplanes in N.A.F.

In addition to the connecting unit consisting of the CSAS with SM.83/SM.75 aircraft, had been assigned to Gen. D.A. Guido Tacchini an aircraft on a personal basis (SM.81 -MM 20480) to carry out his tasks in the area of jurisdiction of the CIAF (France and N.A.F.) and for service meetings with the C.T.A. (German Armistice Commission) based in Wiesbaden and to which he belonged as a liaison officer for the R.A. Lieut. Col. Renato Ronti.

During the year were reactivated some civilian lines between France and Syria, via Greece and via Tunis, demonstrating goodwill the Axis welcomed applications to link the distant French possessions by the Vichy government.

The Italian side was unaffected made initial attempt to undertake an aeronautical industrial collaboration with numerous companies that were in the south of France, a collaboration that could be very useful to the Italian Aircraft industry and to the R.A. The activities of the CIAF in 1941 was directed to solving some logistical problems, including the establishment of refueling points for the N.A.F., the control of parks and aviation deposits in N.A.F. at Blinda, Karouba, Arzew, the establishment of D.C.A. centers in Blida, Tunis, Bizerte, Grano, Maison Blanche (Algiers); There was returned to civilian use requirements about 1,600 vehicles. Also they were set CIAF organic tables for French North Africa as follows:

	Off. Gen.	Off. Sup.	Off. Sub.	NCO	Grad. Troop	Civilians
Army	4	13	20	27	40	17
Navy	2	6	16	11	7	
Air Force	2	9	18	15	7	
Police			3	3	20	
financial police			3	4	10	
	8	28	60	60	84	17[583]

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The Air Force delegation was also part of the study of aeronautical legal problems by Gen. B.A. Francesco Cutry.

Many were the desertions of French pilots registered in 1941, and this state of affairs brought about a worsening of relations between the authorities of NAF and the aviation sub-delegation of the CIAF acting now only in Algeria and Tunisia having been entrusted Moroccan territory to the C.T.A..

DE GUALLIST AVIATION

Have been previously described, the post-armistice stories of some Armée de l'Air units who chose the most tragic moment in France, the road of rebellion against the government formed to support the appeal of General Charles De Gaulle who called French soldiers to fight at the side of England.

Autonomous French squadrons or incorporated in WDAF participated in operations in Libya and in E.A. in 1941 and new units were set up in November 1941 in Syria using the dissolved fighter and bombing groups personnel and material.

It was formed first the GC. III/2 "Alsazia" and shortly after the. I/20 GB "Lorena" who were assigned to the protection of Palestine and particularly of Haifa against Italian air attacks and tasks of maritime surveillance in the eastern Mediterranean.

The foundations of the GC. III/2 were at Ismailia, Alexandria where worked with MS.406 and at the end of 1941, the unit moved to Scotland, on the base of Turnhouse, by passage over to British aircraft and transformation into the 341st Sqdn. RAF. '

The GB. I/20 based in Abu Sweir carried out the passage to Blenheim and then incorporated in the 170th Wing RAF, it moved to Damascus where it was divided into two squadrons assigned respectively to Acre and Tripoli in Syria, with the denomination "Metz" and "Nancy" operating in the eastern Mediterranean and then to Egypt.

While the French units of the Mediterranean suffered the mentioned transformations, other units with French staff were being prepared in England and formed the independent group IV/2 "Ile de France", then called 340th Sqd., With Anglo-French pilots in command of a senior officer of the RAF.

Completed training in Turnhouse, the 340th moved to Drem to take over Spitfire V fighters and be assigned to the 2nd Fighter Group.

Other de Gaullist units formed in 1941 in Chad, based at Fort Lamy, was the GB. II/20 "Bretagne" formatted with detachment staff at Tchad and defectors N.A.F. pilots who took refuge first in Gibraltar and then sent to the Gold Coast and then to Tchad.

Formed first with 4 Glenn Martin and 8 Westland "Lysander" that initially formed the backbone of the unit, the "Bretagne" group took part in attacks on Italian bases in the Fezzan and worked more on desert tracks from the north.

Another squadron christened "Nantes" was formed with 3 Glenn Martin and 5 Blenheim, followed shortly after by the "Rennes" with 6 Lysander and a connecting section with 2 Potez 540 and 2 Haward, which complemented the staff of the group that counted now 30 heterogeneous airplanes. The GB. II/20 was made available by General Leclerc, French commander of the de Gaullist forces of equatorial Africa.[584]

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Italian aircraft industry
Statistics 1941

The aviation industry in 1941[585]

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN
The Italian aircraft industry data statistics 1941

THE AVIATION INDUSTRY IN 1941

1941 was a particularly important year for the Italian aeronautics industry because in the course of 12 months were produced 3,503 aircraft of all types, 250 more units than in 1940 and over 700 more compared to the production that will be registered in 1942: a record that will remain unmatched throughout the course of the war. There was a slight increase in the construction of the bombers by about 12% in parameter with 1940, a 16% increase for the fighters, 8% for transport, 7% for the various types of aircraft and a decrease of 10% for trainer aircraft; It remained stationary instead the production of reconnaissance.

The greatest number of units produced was recorded in March with 424 airplanes built and the lowest in January with 174 aircraft; the monthly average of the war aircraft went up from 121 units in 1940 to 210 in 1941.

The statistical trend, monthly was puzzling, as if to signify, eloquently, lack of industrial organization, residual entrepreneurial strengths, failure at every level to rationally structure the award of contracts, the illogical breakdown thereof, the unpreparedness for certain companies to face, set and meet work demands in the terms established by transforming traditional processes or semi-industrial in programmed rhythms and systems of wooden buildings with other metal.

Dysfunctions and delays also occurred in the delivery of finished products or semi-finished, and it was necessary to assign more organized companies but burdened with orders, new orders to cope with the continuous and urgent needs of the Air War.

The figures in their cold eloquence speak clearly and record that the Italian industry average produced during the war in the 65% measure of its potential, decreasing gradually and progressively productivity from 1940 to 1943, with the exception of 1941; with a discontinuous monthly delivery of airplanes.

We witnessed the fact incomprehensible but true, which found the production of only 167 aircraft in January 1940, this index, which was gradually increased regularly in the months following, until you get the 321 specimens of December extended year, and then descend again and unjustifiably in January 1941 to only 174 aircraft (half of those produced in July 1940), then slowly back in the following months until the end of May, and then descend again December 1941 to 70% of the total built in March. [586]

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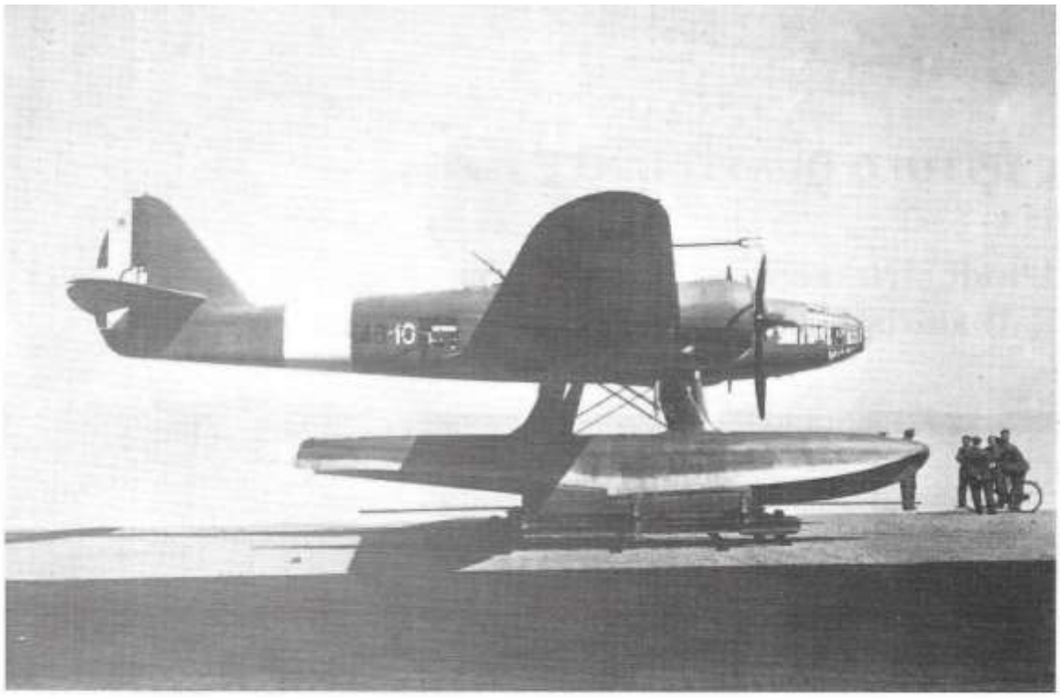

The twin-engine Fiat/RS 14 for the Maritime Reconnaissance assigned to departments in 1941. With such a seaplane came an intermediate quantum leap between the more handsome Cant 506 and exceeded Cant 501.

With such discontinuous records, it occurred in the Italian a reverse phenomenon than the ascending development logic of war production, which will decrease still incredibly in the following years, the bloodiest and the most avid consumers of war material, the average productivity index.

Production forecasts according to a study prepared on 01/15/1941 by Gen. Bruno of the DGCA (Prot. 6/2/01471) and sent to the GS/RA, established a production regularity of wartime aircraft valid until December, with a commitment to maintain this pace until June 1942 and continue gradually until the following December, after having integrated the contracts in place with new orders and funds comprising a total of 1,750 aircraft divided between:

900 fighter (£. 1,116,500,000)
500 bombers (£. 1,210,000,000)
300 scouts (£. 561 million)
50 transport (£. 137.5 million).

For a total financial provision of additional 3.025 billion lire by £. 325,000,000 special parts, spare engines, weapons, tools and accessories.[587]

The Macchi Castoldi Fighter C 202 awarded in the 2nd half of 1941 to the Fighter specialties - 1st Stormo CT -9th and 10th Group CT - was given also in production at Breda and to SIAI.

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The production forecast to be guaranteed until 12/31/1942, was conditional on the timely availability of raw materials, an industrial upgrading and economic fluctuations in prices for materials and labor. But as will be shown later predictions were not fulfilled that to a lesser extent. Considering objectively assessed the situation in the dysfunction of certain manufacturers, carried out periodically by the DGCA inspections were put in relief in the corporate organizational dysfunctions control reports and irrational work which affected greatly in the potential ability of companies.

They were suggested appropriate remedies to remedy the ascertained shortcomings and better accommodation and utilization of the workforce.

The Italian aircraft industry in particular Aeritalia, Caproni and OMIR, was committed to complete the deliveries to foreign customers (Sweden CR.42, Re.2000 and Ca.313) and Hungary (Re.2000 and Ca.135 bis) while Germany had ordered a number of Alfa Romeo Alfa 135RC32 engines to power certain types of giant glider transports (Me.323).

Other foreign customers including Spain and the USSR, had shown some interest, respectively, for the fighter Fabrizi F.5 and the SM.84 by the Spaniards and the Caproni aircraft Ca.331, Ca.355 by the Soviets.

The Italian air force was developing the four-engine Piaggio P.108 entrusted to test commander Nicolò Lana, with a number of changes and improvements in the areas longitudinal stability and compensation of the rudder, the arrangement of the pilots seats and the elimination of the shaking of the fuselage in the agitated atmosphere. Other improvements were greater visibility of machine gunners, the locking of the moveable floor to the deck and the dropping of "Heaven" pilot cabin, reinforced tires, handwheels for more rational piloting, AS outlets to the engines, interior lights and dashboard, greater luminous intensity collimators S. Giorgio of Breda Z2 turrets, general mechanical devices and different accommodation of the mechanical bomb release and for the application of motorized bomb FFF, the double landing lights, quick fuel drain and other useful changes. The assignment to the P.108 units was scheduled for late summer.

The entry into service of the three-engine- SIAI SM.84 had resulted in a first not very encouraging report by the Lt. Col. Muti, Commander of the 41st Independent Group BT., Which on 1 June 1941 he wrote to Gen. Pricolo a report on highlighting aircraft the following points: the limited autonomy of the aircraft (2.15 hours with 1000 kg of bombs) and the take-off difficulties with fuel overload (Lt. 3250 + 600) to increase albeit slightly, with a long take-off run for the detachment from the ground and without the availability of maneuver until the time of closing of the cowl flaps, subsequent difficulties flight that severely limited the use of the three-engine to be used only in areas of vast dimensions and free of surrounding obstacles. The mediocre behavior in flight up to 5000 m altitude, became tiring than the proportion making often impossible flight on patrol with groups of 10-15 units with serious injury to the compactness of the unit and serious risks to the war flying at lower altitudes for the strong anti-aircraft fire, particularly of warships. It was preferable to have online of only 50 Cant.1007 Bis instead of 100 SM.84, because even as a three-engined SIAI torpedo bomber offered few possibilities, concluded in his report by Li. Col. Muti.

For the three-engine SM.84 was prepared a version Bis to improve performance of the aircraft series; 48 specimens were modified with V wing (SM.84/V) for particular use.

As of December 31, 1941 the aircraft delivered by the SIAI workshops amounted to 151 specimens of which 7 version V, 99 of the first series and 44 bis (2nd series).

The first negative results on the use in war and disappointing welcome it received in the units by the new three-engine SM.84, deflate not just the hopes of the GSA that much counted on the SIAI aircraft to find a successor to the SM.79, considered outdated and redevelop the bombing line.

In fact, the 200 specimens of SM.84 ordered in 1941 (about 30% of the bombers in order) would have caused due to poor choice to address a serious crisis in the specialty, as they seemed, even with all the improvements planned, difficult operational use and it was therefore necessary to run for cover with emergency measures transforming some BT Stormi into fighting with the assignment of the twin-engine Ca.313 and putting urgently studying a technical improvement of SM.79 equipped with Alfa 128 engines more powerful and structural and instrumental changes.[588]

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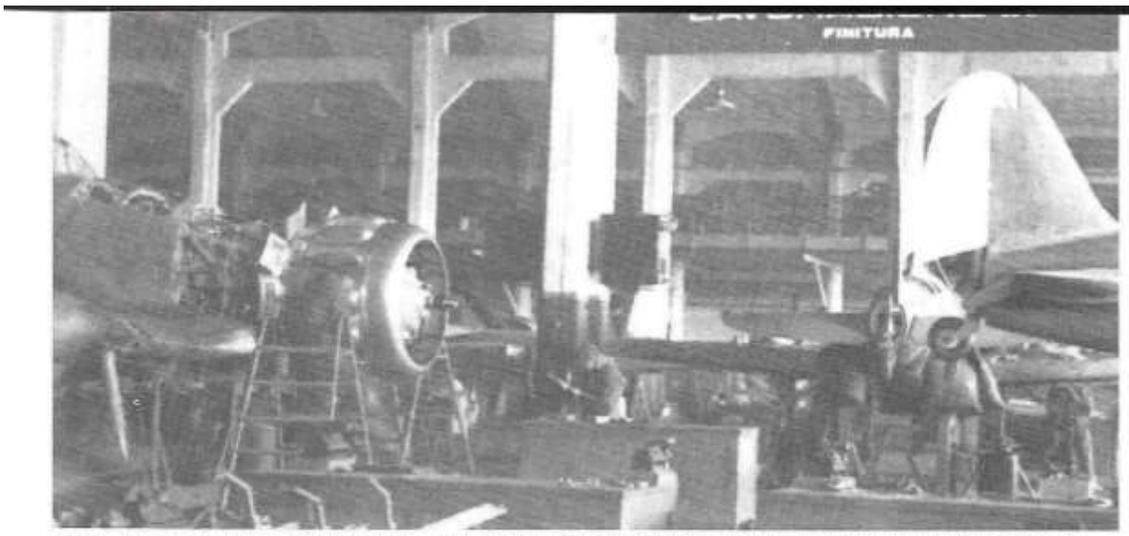

In 1941 continued production at Macchi, Breda and SIAI the Macchi C 200. The plane of Eng. Castoldi had yet maintained throughout 1941, a primary role in the specialty,

The first measure proved absolutely impossible for the chosen material deficiency, the transformation of SM.79 instead got better results with increased speed, stability and autonomy and were then assigned new orders of SM.79 Bis to the OMIR and to the AUSA having in the meantime the SIAI dismantled and moved the production line of the "Sparviero" to devote to the production of the SM.84, SM.82 and SM.75.

Best results are obtained instead in fighter aircraft. For Re.2001/DB.601 ordained in 1940 in 550 specimens (200 OMIR, 200 Breda, 100 Caproni -Taliedo, 50-Caproni Predappio) but there were numerous vicissitudes including the drastic reduction of the 100 pieces ordered by OMIR (50 -50 normal type OR - Roma Organisation, catapult CV version) 50 Re.2001/OR will be ordered in April 1941. Total Cancellation of orders Breda, Caproni-Taliedo and reduction to only 10 copies- of the Caproni Predappio order.

Other changes on the Re.2001 occurred in 1941 for airplanes committed to the OMIR, 39 of whom had to have a hook for ventral bomb, 2 lightened for tests with ground take-off and 12 for workout on track with hook-brake for expected use by the CV.

At the end of October the OMIR had received only 40 DB.601 engines and prepared a series of thirty aircraft and some experimental including one equipped with engine I.F. Delta 840 HP. After the death of Commander Scapinelli with Re.2001 during a trial, the evidence was taken by Commander Agello and they continued the experiments with engines, weapons, various equipment and instrumentation between Reggio Emilia, Taliedo, Guidonia and Furbara, began to be delivered the first operational aircraft to units and in particular the 2nd group CT. that took them first after leaving the G.50 Bis.

Another fighter aircraft engine DB.601 delivered to units in 1941 was the Macchi C.202 "Folgore" tested and perfectly tuned by Commander Guido Carestiato.

Started series production in the spring of 1941, the aircraft was first assigned to the 9th Group C.T. who he trained at length between June and September before moving to Sicily at the end of the month.

But the GSA on the Macchi aircraft took a particular judgment to know strengths and weaknesses of MC.202, entrusting to Maj. Luigi Bianchi the task of proving the MC.202 and prepare a report in this regard.

The report prepared in October included the following results: (aircraft MC.202 MM.7710 2nd standard specimen) very easy take-off; behavior - machine very stable in flight, secure, perfectly under control in any positions - piloting easier compared to MC.200 for the best wing compensation - (speed obtained from to 350 km/h over 600); at low speed (350 km/h at 230) the aircraft is fully controllable if it is well controlled - with sudden move you notice strong shaking in tail and the aircraft straightens or tends to tip over (sometimes) on the right, however, easily offsetting the wing irregularity.[589]

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Adjust screw spontaneously and controlled-Down and very easy landing with very balanced aircraft (much better than the MC.200).

In October Gen. Pricolo sent to the Duce a note on behavior in war of the MC.202 (Mussolini had inspected in September the 4th Fighter Stormo with MC.202 at Ciampino).

Gen. Pricolo after listing strengths and weaknesses emerged with MC.200, set out the reasons which led to the design of the MC.202, which resulted modified, improved, strengthened, enhanced over its predecessor.

"Affirmation of the exceptional new machine, with brilliant flight characteristics, perfectly developed, ready to receive two other wing weapons distinguished at once in combat with victorious results was the enthusiastic description that the Chief of Staff made to Mussolini of the new Italian fighter.

He concluded his memo the Chief of Staff, highlighting the professional value of the designer Eng. Castoldi and collaboration that occurred between the various technical bodies of the Ministry entrusted to Gen. Bernasconi and the Macchi company to obtain so brilliant results and proposed to the Duce to send Eng. Castoldi a picture of him with the dedication: "Eng. Castoldi MC. 202 designer".

As he began the delivery of the first prestigious and competitive fighter with an in-line engine and to the Italian air force it was a long-awaited breakthrough, delayed to die the biplane idea rooted in certain Italian aviation leaders, since the same year, the GS/RA during a service meeting with the DGCA, taking seriously an order for Aeritalia of 150 CR.42 equipped with DB.601 engine to be added to the other of 300 with a radial engine irrationally ordered more for sentimental reasons than practical, in the hope that the adoption of a more powerful engine as the Mercedes Benz of over 1000 HP, it had the unique power to revive and to further establish an obsolete and useless constructive formula.

The unavailability of engines DB.601 not sufficient for MC.202 and Re.2001, fortunately did wreck the project, directing supplies to the Luftwaffe and manufacture of the Alfa-Pomigliano, towards more logical and rational utilization of the DB.601.[590]

The twin-engine Caproni Ca. 313 with continuous glass bow modified in other pictured stepped here in an experimental torpedo version. It was produced for the RA and exported to Sweden.

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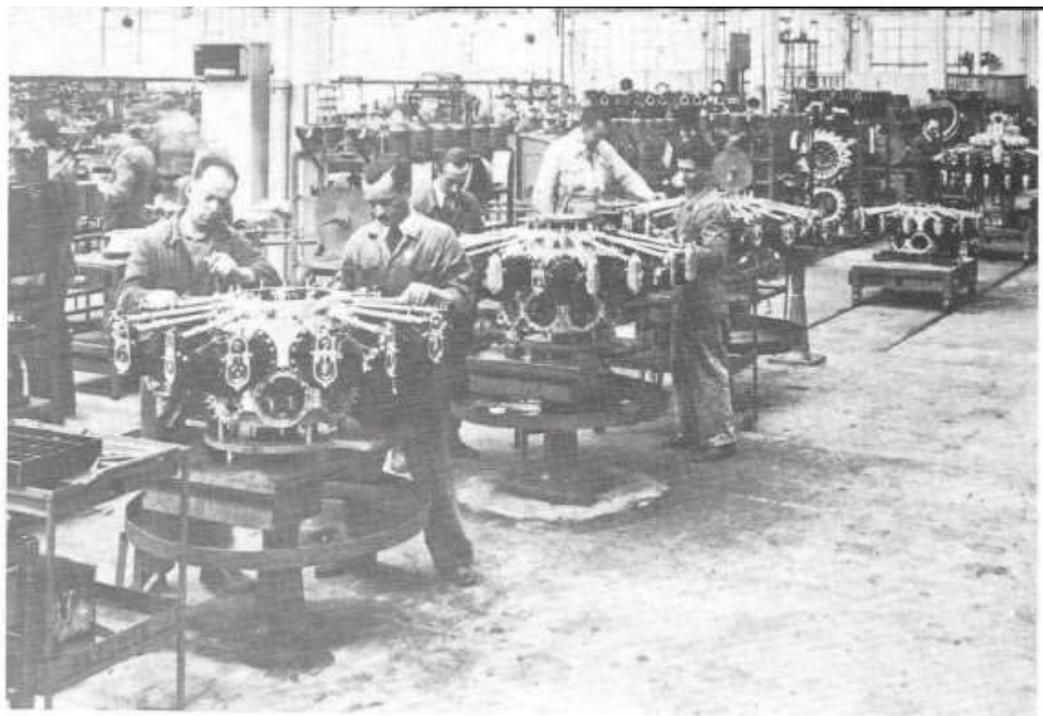
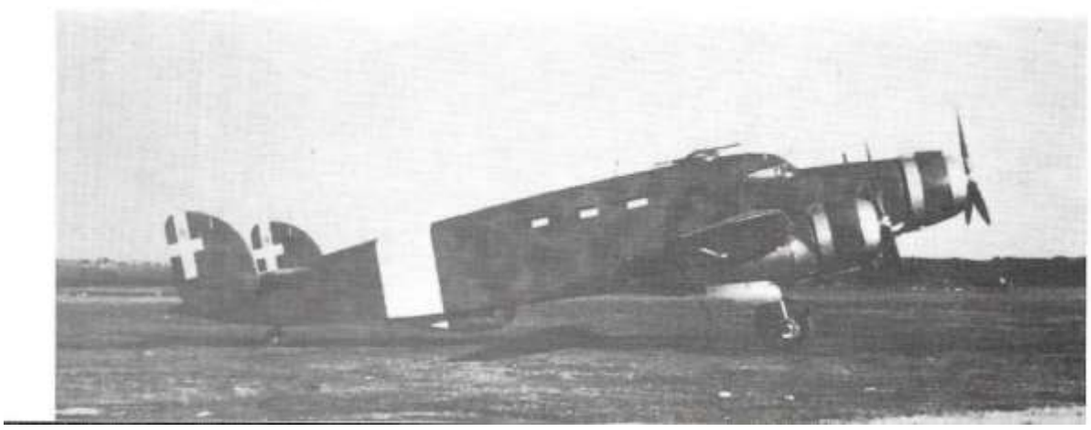


Fiat/Lingotto factory for the production of A74RC38 radial engines for fighter CR. 42. G 50. MC. 200 and the three-engined G 12 (RC version. 42). The Fiat engine was also built by OMIR and OM

Among the projects considered for a possible construction in series, it appeared also a STOL aircraft equipped with wing patented by Eng. Ugo Antoni, also applicable to light aircraft such as Ba.15 and Ca.100 with simple modifications, and can realize landings not exceeding 50 m; because they were under construction and assignment similar aircraft - Ro.63 and C.4 - and there were negotiations with the RLM for a supply of Fi.156, the GSA is not considered appropriate to amend the situation and the project with Antoni figured in a four-seater biplane for reconnaissance - connections was rejected. Among the Order approved during the year included Cant.515 twin-engine seaplanes, MC.205 fighter, three-engined SM.75, SM.81/T, Ca.133/T and Ca.148/P, SM.82 for transport, Re.2001 and Mc.202, Re.2000 catapult and the long range Cant. 506/S, Fc.20 Bis, Cant.1018, RS.14, all orders that served as junction between orders in the process of delivery and completion.

The excessive responsibility assigned to the CSAS designed to perform multiple tasks of service of different latitudes, advised the GS to call into activity into the line former bomber aircraft to be allocated to transport, restoring the now out of production for years of the SIAI-SM.81, of the Caproni Ca.133 and Ca.148 in T (Transport) and P (Paratroopers) versions assigning orders to the San Giorgio of Pistoia, the Caproni-Vizzola and Predappio, the AVIS and the IMAM of Castellammare and Naples.[591]

The three-engine MS 84 assigned in 1941 to the specialties Bombing / Torpedo Bomber in place, it was thought, the old, but still valid MS. 79, The new bomber proved disappointing and unreliable.



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In the transformation sector included two work orders to Agusta Soc. to change to a “dive bomber" 80 twin-engine Ba.88 and an order to the Caproni-Vizzola Soc. to change to a “dive bomber trainer" n. 40 Ba.65.

Other orders were: 2625 Salvator parachutes (Aerostatics Ivoire), replacement parts for Cant.1007 Bis (CRDA), hangars 100x36x9 m. (Saporiti company), bomb throwers for Ca.313 (Caproni Soc.), electro hydraulic Breda type V turret (Breda), 15,000 envelopes per 100 SPL bombs (Isotta Fraschini), 2000 Scotti 12.7 cal weapons (Isotta Fraschini) and other materials.

The occurrence of certain production difficulties due to a lack of continuity in the allocation of contracts for the southern aeronautical industries, had the effect of granting by the SMA an extraordinary workload for 1941 with a financial commitment of £. 245 million, which was distributed as follows:

Aeronautica Sicula (aircraft) - Palermo	£. 28,574,600	(construction)
	£. 1,336,348	(spare parts)
	£. 2,320,000	(repairs)
	£. 32,230,948	
Alfa Romeo (engine) - Pomigliano of Arc	£. 59,716,558	(construction, spare parts, repairs)
AVIS (aircraft) - Castellammare di Stabia	£. 21,121,146	(construction, spare parts, repairs)
Caproni / Vlizzola (aircraft) -Elmas	£. 7,525,000	(repairs)
IMAM (aircraft) -Naples	£. 73,461,569	(construction, spare parts, repairs)
Navalmeocanica (aircraft) - Naples	£. 14.650.974	(construction, spare parts)
SACA (aircraft) - Brindisi	£. 12,954,871	(construction, spare parts, repairs)
SACA (engines) - Brindisi	£. 7,542,500	(repairs)
OSA (engines) - Naples	£. 15,109,000	(spare parts, repairs)

In the design of turbine engines had been greeted with keen interest the design of a new, more powerful Campini jet engine destined to war and civil uses, consisting of a gas turbine power of 3500 HP (weight 1,000 kg) with a kerosene consumption of just 180 gr/HP. The new project of Eng. Campini presented at the end of November, the newly-appointed Chief of Staff Gen. Fougier, gained immediate interest and encouragement for the next implementation phase.

German deliveries were limited in 1941 in replacement parts for Ju.87 (a requested on 3/20/41 by Gen. Pricolo to Goering for 10-12 Stukas monthly for reinstatements had not been successful); They were also given the 7050 SC./SD.50-250-500 type bombs and Flam C.250/S.500 over 2000 exercise bombs, 200 drop 250 lt. tanks for Ju.87 and 50 Jumo 211 engines parts.

Had been ordered 10 Wurzburg radar and Freya 5, 150 Siemens route correctors, 10 pneumatic lifting equipment type Milller/Berlin for SM.79, lights board to flicker, Steinbock trucks for Stukas (LWC/500-IX) bombs, 6 tackles for bombs (100/250 kg.), 10,000 elements for MG.17 tapes, 10 VDM propellers, two machine: it for balancing propellers, 50 anti-sand intakes, 1,200,000 ga. 7,92, 50 Winkel pre-heaters for CSIR aviation, 400 Drager inhalers, 4 Argus AS.10/C3 engines, 17 Hirt HL. 508/DC. engines, 450 DB.601 engines, 15 DB.605.

The amount of orders to the RLM had been for 1941 of RM. 43,595,000 (about one billion lire) was partially offset by the Italian supplies including 150 Alfa 135 engines, for lire 105,000,000 and 1000 motobombe F.F.F. ordered the company, with tin for a total of 18; million.

During 1941 the DGCA had failed to define the assignments of military inspectors in the aviation companies and the new situation was as follows:[592]

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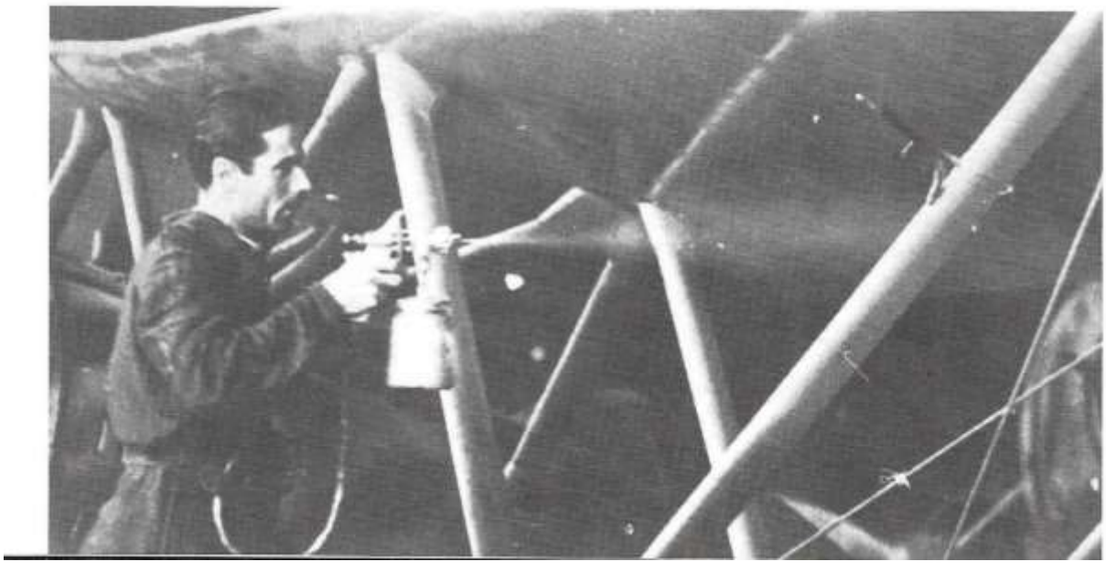
CRDA	- 2nd Lt. Achille Buffoli
SAI	- Sgt. Giulio Morelli - 2nd Lt. Domenico Tessara - Lt. Pierino Colombo
Piaggio/F.	- Capt. Aldo Moggi - Lt. Nicholas Lana
Magni	- Sgt. Rodotlfo Stoppani
Nardi	- Lt. Col. Giovanni Zappetta
Aeritalia	- Capt. Vittore Catella
SIAI	- Sgt. Fernando Rosei -Capt. Nunzio Prota
IMAM	- Sgt. Francesco Barbato -2nd Lt. Franco Jadanza - Lt. Domenico Girdle
C.A. T.	- Sgt. Angelo Broggini -2nd Lt. Cesare Gallieni
AVIS	- Sgt. Augusto Korompay
OMIR	- Capt. Tullio De Prato - Lt. Silvio Casarotto- Lt. Alfonso Caracciolo di Forino
Caproni/Vizzola	- Lt. Arturo Faocini - Sgt. Sante Moda
Breda	- Sgt. Sergio Forlini - Lt. Giampiero Anadello - Sgt. Aldo Anzani - Lt. Col. Guido Masiero
CANSA	- Sgt. Franco Nardini - Capt. Riccardo Markovic
CMASA	- Sgt. Carlo Fortunato
Queirolo/Farina	- Capt. Adniano Mantelli
AVIA	- Lt. Nello Raimondo
Caproni/Predappio	- Sgt. Domenico Rossetti
Caproni/Trento	- Sgt. Zambelli Sergio Rossi - Sgt. Aldo Bianchi
Ala Littoria	- Capt. Cesare Magistrini - Capt. Ildebrando Marchiari -2nd Lt. Emilio Savelli - 2nd Lt. Emilio Orlandini

In technical collaboration with Germany had been sent to the Reich work assignments including to Fiat for DB. 605 engines with technicians Ragazzi, Sola, Benedetti, Tamagno, De Grandis, Zoppi, Ponzetto, Ranella, Vaudano, Marchisio, Petrazzini, Rolle assisted by Lt. Col. Gari Ferraris and Manini of the FSO/Fiat. A mission for Bosch pumps directed by Eng. Perosino and Giannetti and Fiat technicians Chiarcossi, Gazzellino and Quartero. The R.A. had sent a team of specialists to the Karl Zeiss photographers of Jena with Capt. Binelli and Sgt. Pennisi and Bonino, the Sgt. Ilda, Collins, Avarello, Ensigns for a specialization course on industrial robot Rb. 30x30.[593]

The CR. 42 finish with spray painting. The Aeritalia biplane was still produced in large series in 1941. It was also made a prototype with linear motor DB 601.



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Course for Siemens Microtechnology instrumentalists technicians (Raina and Weingrill) and Fiat/Avio (De Ferrari and Larizza) were organized for the planned adoption of the Siemens AG. rails Lt. Col. Gari Stefanutti was sent to Germany for a working visit and knowledge of cargo gliders and Luftwaffe transport view using these aircraft for transport aircraft to N.A.; participated in the "gliders" mission Capt. Bertello, the 2nd Lt. Gallieni and Raimondo, pilots Francis Lombardi of the AVIA and Mortara.

A special course at Travemunde on brake landing on carrier ships was made by Capt. Luigi Freri, in anticipation of producing of a landing simulator at Orvieto in view of the O.R. (Organization Rome) project.

Was regulated compensatory measure for the rights of reproduction aircraft at other companies so ordered:

Aircraft 4% of value of the aircraft for first 100 - 3% for the next 100 and no right over that number.

Engines 4% for the first 300 engines and 3% for 300 seconds and no right for the other engines.

Aircraft for travel 3% for the first 200 copies 2% for the next 100.

Aircraft war 4% for first 200 copies, 3% for the next 100.[594]

Lady working on the structure of the tail surfaces at the SIAI. In 1941 the Italian industry produced mixed aircraft construction to a high extent. More modest production of metallic airplane.

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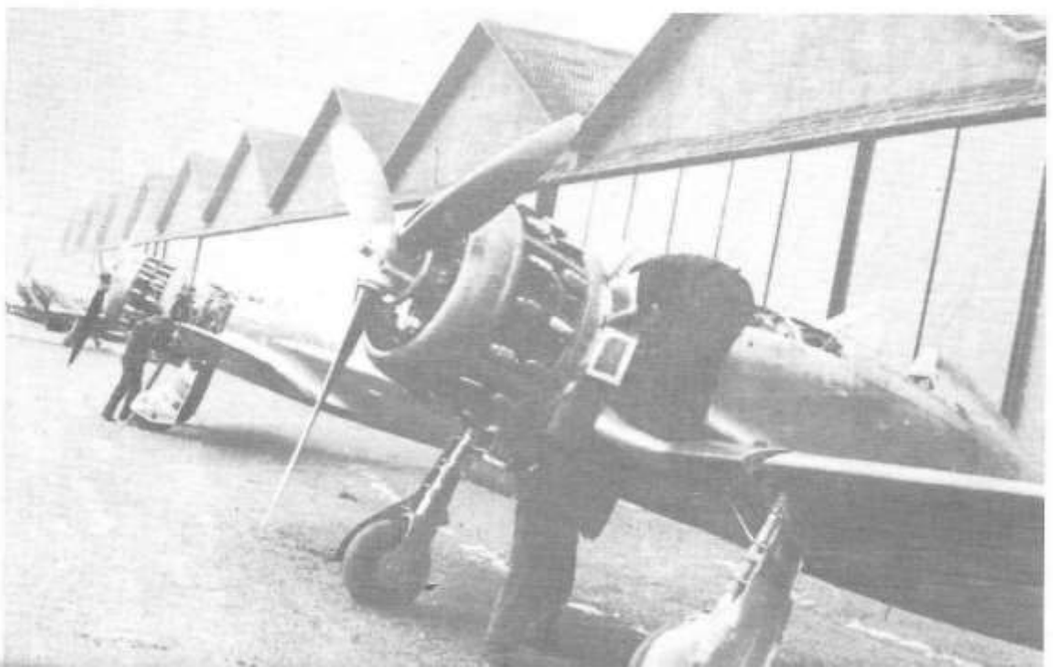
A three-engine SM. 79 in testing at the OMIR workshops. The aircraft Eng Marchetti was built in 1941 by "Reggiane and the AUSA workshops Foligno (S Govi Collection)

Industrial and organizational reasons other less justifiable causes, influenced during the year a still large order for Radial Engine for fighters ordered (over 1100 between CR.42, G.50 Bis, MC. 200) instead of concentrating the production mass on the new linear-engine aircraft now perfectly ready and put into production, with a serious waste of raw materials and manpower and with the result of assigning aircraft to the units that were no longer competitive. The same criterion was applicable to the production of the DB 601 linear engines entrusted to Alfa Romeo, and the fact that an engine acquired since 1939 had not yet found, in late 1941, an acceptable quantitative production despite the vastness and modernity of the plants of the new Alfa factory in Pomigliano d'Arco, did not find sufficient justification.[595]

Final check before the test in Macchi workshops of Lonate Pozzolo. They notice MC. MC 200 and 202 waiting to pass into the hands of export company testers.



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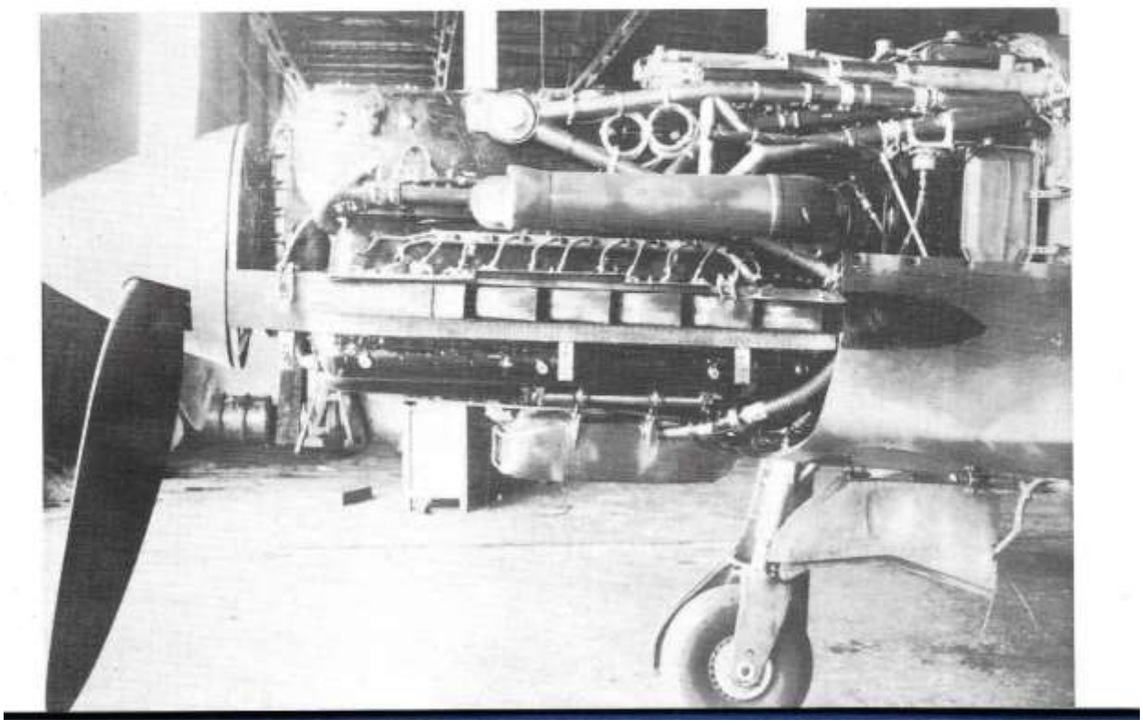
The same can be said was to be for great OMIR workshops of Reggio Emilia -among the most modern and impressive in Italy-which employed around 10,000 employees in the various industrial processes of the plant, whose management had started since 1940 in open disagreement with the DGCA meeting for the Re.2000 first and then for the Re.2001, with the result of creating a serious directive, organizational and productive crisis.

The failed Re.2000 project for the Air Force's intransigence to reject the aircraft whose production was destined to the extent of 90% to foreign customers, locked and resized for technical and financial reasons, the production of Re.2001 series, aeronautical activities of OMIR was conveyed during 1941 the licensed production of the SM.79, the A.74 RC.38 engines (Fiat) P. VIIC35 (Piaggio) and P.XI Bis long been under construction in Reggio Emilia. Had been built in 1941 a total of 213 aircraft (90 SM.79, 65 Falco, 38 Re.2001, 20 Re.2000 Cat./GA) while motor/aviation production had been satisfied to the extent of 90% of the order of 990 engines of A.74/P.XI Bis models.

These results do not, however, represented only 50% of the production potential of 1941 (easily susceptible to increases of up to 1000 samples per year with more rational organization) and as a result of this state of things there was a severe curtailment of 40% of the orders that led the OMIR aeronautical revenues by 613 million of December 1940 to 321 million in December 1941. An incomprehensible situation emerged dramatically in the middle of the war with serious repercussions in aircraft production.

It would certainly be more appropriate to normalize the situation, assign to the OMIR of Mc.202 committed to leverage the business potential (as a positive fact with Breda) waiting to finalize the Re.2001, solving financial problems and concentrate production of DB.601 Alfa and imported from Germany to build upon a single competitive fighter and assign it to the remaining 16 groups still with radial engine biplanes and monoplanes.[596]

The Mercedes engine DB 601 product in the new Alfa Romeo plant in Pomigliano d'Arco and also provided by the RLM hundreds of specimens for the insufficient Italian production.



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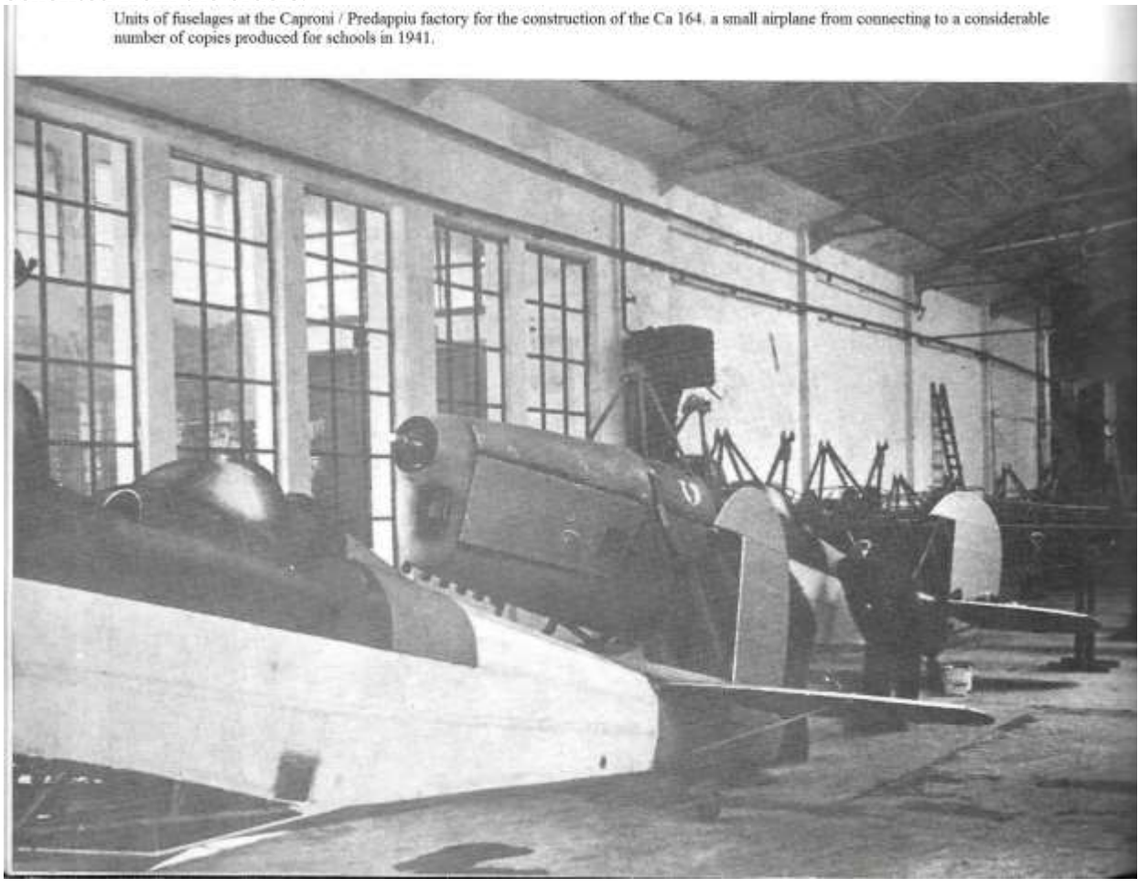
With the new orders, OMIR would have worked at full capacity and at maximum potential without causing any worries, the fighter line would have qualitatively improved its war potential, the line departments would have increased the presence of modern and fast airplanes in their squadrons.

The uncertain and in some cases confused the aviation policy address given by the Ministry to the industries, had not yet found into the war the necessary directive clarity, the right organizational balance between capacity and productivity, the courage necessary to remove the unnecessary aspects and dispersive the production, the strength to change in - common interest - business prospects, channeling efforts, will, availability of raw materials and workforce of more logical and achievable results.

Compared with 41 models of aircraft in production in 1940 (9 bombers - 9 fighter/Assault - 10 scouts - 10 school - 3 transport) with 20 different engines between Italians and foreign, was recorded in 1941 a slightly improved situation with 33 models in construction (6 fighter -5 bombers - 9 scouts - 5 transportation - 8 school) and with 16 different engines.

Were actually many more models in production-both for airplanes and for engines - and for this purpose the Ministry of Aeronautica through its technical bodies (DGCA-ISTM-UCA etc.) Would have to exert maximum effort to regulate further aircraft production, unify the line eliminating similar and competitive airplanes between them after careful, strict and objective selection, compensation with sub-license contracts the failure to corporate activities, reduce just and effective engine propulsion -aviation sector, encourage economies and convey all the Units in a rationalized production, coordinated, harmonic balance in which all would work and benefited from the orders.[597]



Units of fuselages at the Caproni / Predappiu factory for the construction of the Ca 164, a small airplane from connecting to a considerable number of copies produced for schools in 1941.

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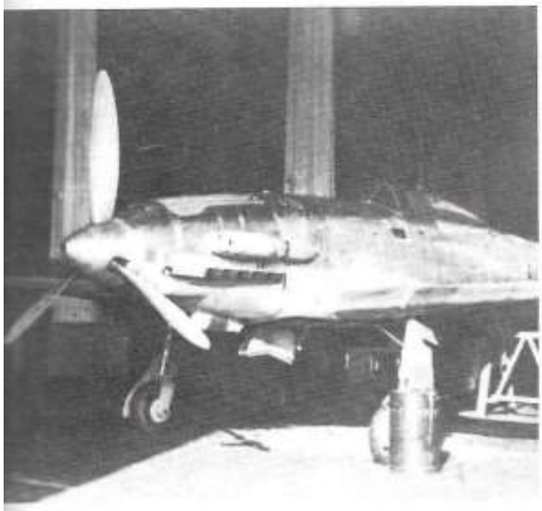
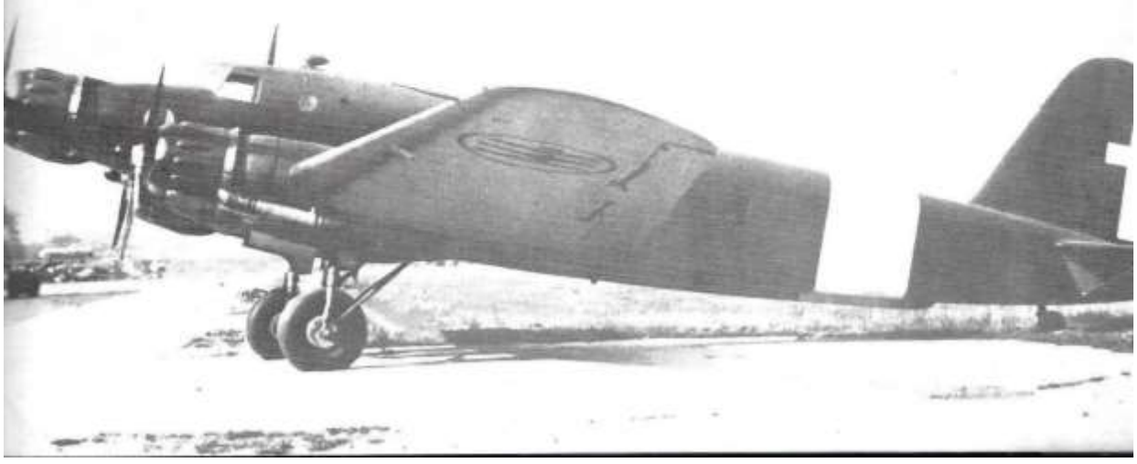
Mc. 202 aircraft in production at the Breda aviation workshops of Sesto S Giovanni, Breda in 1941 despite not having its own models. He produced with dedication and seriousness hundreds of Macchi fighters.



Final camouflage painting to a tri-motor CRDA Cant 1007Bis produced in large series in 1941 and awarded in co-production with IMAM and Piaggio/Finale.

The four-engine Piaggio P 108/B whose first models were approved in 1941 to for the 247th Sqd. BGR. It was the first Italian Air Force strategic bomber (Photo Piaggio)



AIRCRAFT ORDERS ISSUED IN 1941

		Registration MM.	Amount	Company assigned	Contract
BREDA					
Ba.25	n. 50	MM.51946/51995	£. 4,600,000	C.N.A.	
MACCHI					
MC.200	n. 24	MM.4857/4880	£. 8,592,000	S.A.I.	644
	n. 16	MM.4881/4896	£. 7,418,000	S.A.I.	631
	n. 10	MM.4897/4906	£. 3,580,000	S.A.I.	666
	n. 106	MM.5815/5920	£. 43,142,000	Breda	4376
	n. 55	MM.6490/6544	£. 22,385,000	Macchi	753
Mc.202	n. 50	MM.6560/6609	£. 24,734,900	Breda (later S.A.I.)	779
MC.200	n. 44	MM.6660/6703	£. 17,728,000	S.A.I.	504
	n. 10	MM.6715/6724	£. 3,723,000	S.A.I.	450
	n. 20	MM.6725/6744	£. 7,980,000	S.A.I.	475
	n. 50	MM.7659/7708	£. 20,277,720	Macchi	920
Mc.202	n. 150	MM.7709/7858	£. 76,300,000	Macchi	939
	n. 100	MM. 7859/7958	£. 51,800,000	Breda	4512
MC.200	n. 50	MM.8209/8338	£. 23,540,000	Breda	4358
	n. 30	MM.8437/8466	£. 13,810,000	S.A.I.	683
	n. 50	MM.8794/8843	£. 20,277,720	Macchi	903
	n. 765		£. 344,288,340		
A.V.I.S. (No production of aircraft designed to the company for 1941)					
O.M.I.R.					
Re.2000	n. 12	MM.8059/8070	£. 8412518	Omir	410
Re.2001	n. 200	MM.90150/90349	£. 134,500,000	Breda (canceled)	
	n. 100	MM.7209/7308	£. 66,752,000	Omir	698
	n. 10	MM.8071/8080	£. 6,850,000	Caproni/Predappio	4864
	n. 50	MM.8744/8793	£. 68,000,000	Caproni/Talieldo (canceled)	
	n. 100	MM.8644/8743	£. 68,000,000	Caproni/Predappio (canceled)	
	n. 122		£. 81,834,518		
S.A.I.					
Sai 207	n. 12	MM.8425 /8436	£. 468 3526000	Sai	
NARDI					
FN.305	n. 150	MM.51638/51787	£. 33,750,000	Piaggio/F.	3496
	n. 50	MM.52071/52120	£. 11.257.000	Piaggio/F. 4375/3511*	
	n. 8	MM.52752/52759	£. 1,800,000	Piaggio/F. 3513**	
FN.315	n. 25	MM.51871/51895	£. 4541470	Nardi/L.	642
	n. 25	MM.51841/51865	£. 3854700	Agusta	4398
	n.258		£. 55,203,370		

(*) From MM.52084/52109 -Comm. 4375 to Hungary -26 specimens.
(**) Products until the MM.52755 to 09/08/1943.[598]

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AERITALIA

G.50/B	n. 20	MM.6308/6327	£. 7,810,000	CMASA	618
G.50/Bis	n. 87	MM.6328/6414	£. 37,980,294	CMASA	571
G.50/B *	n. 75	MM.6415/6489	£. 23,810,112	CMASA	3487
G.50 Bis	n. 10	MM.6490/6499	£. 4,115,080 ,	CMASA	580
CR.30/B	n. 10	MM.6704/6713	£. 2,064,000	CANSA	3304
CR.42 (C.N.)	n. 20	MM. 7048/7067	£. 5,984,000	Aeritalia	3302
G.50 Bis	n. 40	MM.7068/7107	£. 12,280,000	Aeritalia	3615
CR.42 (B.a.)	n. 100	MM.7109/7208	£. 34,810,700	Aeiritalia	3331
CR.42 (B.a.)	n. 200	M,M.7459/7658	£. 62,890,816	Aeritalia	3333
CR.42	n. 94	MM.8467/8560	£. 32,148,280	Aeritalia	3404
G.50 Bis	n. 34	MM.8561/8594	£. 13,680,712	CMASA (Aeritalia)	3428
BR.20/M	n. 38	MM.22669/22706	£. 44,710,153	Aeritalia	3401
	n. 50	MM.22707/22756	£. 52,918,800	Aeritalia	3357
	n. 50	MM.24102/24151	£. 52,220,607	Aeritalia	3355
R.S.14	n. 12	MM.35386/35397	£. 10,440,000	CMASA	375
C.5	n. 50	MM.51588/51637	£. 11,440,118	CANSA	3284
G.12 (C.-T.) 3512**	n. 21	MM.60649/60669	£. 42,080,536	Aeritalia	
G.12/T 815***	n. 40	MM.60681/60720	£. 98,400,000	Aeritalia	
	n. 951		£. 549,784,208		

(*) Example MM.6477 for Croazia
(**)Example MM.60669 for Hungrey -ex Example for aviolinee (12 version C)
(***)Example MM. 60682 for Hungrey -9 examples version C (ex aviolinee) construction version TP, CR, TR, LGA, GA, TGA.

S.I.A.I.

SM.87	n. 4	MM.447/450	£. 9,840,000	Siai/V	900
SM.84*	n. 151	MM.22395/22545	£. 144,960,740	Siai/V.	916*
SM.84 Bis	n. 51	MM.24559/24609	£. 53,206,974	Sia'i/V.	917
SM.79	n. 6	MM.22789/22794	£. 6,540,000	AUSA	865
	n. 8	MM.23827/23834	£. 8,120,000	OMIR	540
	n. 24	MM.23838/23861	£. 17,400,000	SIAI/V.	675
	n. 16	MM.23862/23877	£. 11,424,000	SIAI/V.	676
	n. 10	M,M.23878/23887	£. 7,250,000	OMIR	235
	n. 4	MM.23888/23891			
	n. 10	MM.23892/23901	£. 10,902,942	AUSA	569
	n. 40	MM.23935/23974	£. 28,878,000	OMIR	343
	n. 26	MM.24076/24101	£. 18,898,000	OMIR	523
	n. 12	MM.24152/24163	£. 9,345,384	AUSA	558
	n. 14	MM.24164/24177	£. 10,902,948	AUSA	569
SM.82	n. 30	MM.60483/60512	£. 38,268,686	SIAI/V.	895
	n. 50	MM.60586/ 60635	£. 67,249,240	SIAI/V.	894
SM.75/T	n. 12	MM.60534/60553	£. 18,340,740	SIAI/J.	942
	n. 468		£. 455.527.654		

(*) Part Bis version -n. 48 specimens with wing V (Dip)[599]

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CAPRONI					
Ca.309	n. 50	MM.12365/12414	£. 15,183,800	CAB	4784
	n. 8	MM.12656/12663	£. 1,898,464	CAB	4678
Ca.311	n. 24	MM.11697/11720	£. 12,800,000	AVIS	1631
	n. 54	MM.11721/11774	£. 24.283,750	CAB	4401
Ca.314	n. 14	MM.11916/11929	£. 56,118,000	Caproni/Taliedo	4764
Ca.314/S	n. 4	MM.12051/12054	£. 2,380,464	Taliedo	4679*
Ca.313	n. 60	MM.11930 /11989	£. 36,100,220	CAB	4631
	n. 60	MM.11990/12049	£. 36,100,220	CAB	4673
Ca.313/S	n. 1	MM.12050	£. 482,810	CAB	4940*
Ca.164	n. 50	MM.50748/50797	£. 2,470,810	Caproni/Predappio	566
	n. 325		£. 187,817,728		

(*) Torpedo Bomber version for the N.A.S.

A.V.I.A.					
FL.3	n. 10	MM.56353/56362	£. 640,000	Avia	3412/3296
	n. 100	MM.56423/56522	£. 4,944,584	Agusta	4056/4687
	n. 25	MM.56523/56547	£. 1,234,296	Agusta	3396
	n. 40	MM.56548/56587	£. 1,967,160	Agusta	4286
	n. 40	MM.56588/56627	£. 1,732,326	Avia	3283
	n. 215		£. 10,568,366		
S.A.I.M.A.N.					
Sa.200	n. 75	MM.51178/51252	£. 6,675,000	Caproni/Vizzola	-
	n. 40	MM.51253/51292	£. 3,768,900	Caproni/Vizzola	-
	n. 25	MM.51563/51587	£. 2,748.610	Saiman	915
Sa.202	n. 25	MM.51293/51317	£. 2,232,508	CNA	1540
	n. 50	MM.51318/51367	£. 4,740,000	CNA	1563
	n. 10	MM.51368/51377	£. 783,680	CNA	1619
	n. 65	MM.51458/51522	£. 5,135,000	SACA	1565
	n. 30	MM.51523/51552	£. 3,093,536	Saiman	1638
	n. 10	MM.51553/51562	£. 782,410	Saiman	1639
	n. 330		£. 29.684.644		
I.M.A.M.					
Ro.63	n. 6	MM.11591/11596	£. 1,100,000	IMAM	1408
Ro.41/B	n. 50	MM.51996/52045	£. 5,142,900	AVIS	1641
	n. 25	MM.52245/52269	£. 2,532,045	Agusta	4643
Ro.43	n. 20	MM.27173/27192	£. 6,240,000	IMAM	1417
	n. 101		£.15,014,945		
PIAGGIO					
P.108/B	n. 8	MM.22001/22008	£.25.800.800	Piaggio/F.P.	3104
	n. 4	MM.22601/22604	£. 10.400.000	Piaggio/F.P.	3273
	n. 12		£. 36.200.800[600]		

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C.R.D.A.

Cant.1007 Bis	n. 50	MM.23278/23327	£. 63,780,140	CRDA	1822/523
	n. 50	MM.23328/23377	£. 63,780,140	CRDA	1390/597*
	n. 54	MM.23378/23431	£. 69,693,600	IMAM	600
	n. 20	MM.23432/23451	£. 18,824,000	IMAM	451
	n. 36	MM.23728/23763	£. 34,280,000	CRDA	591
Cant.1018/L	n. 10	MM.24290/24299	£. 11,300,000 .	CRDA	471
	n. 100	MM.22795/22894	£. 51,800,000	Breda (canceled)	4438
Cant.501	n. 10	MM.35459/35468	£. 4,472,000	Aersicula	673
	n. 19	MM.35469/35487	£. 8,700,700	Aersicula	1566
	n. 11	MM.35488/35498	£. 4,544,600	Aersicula	661
	n. 15	MM.35499/35513	£. 6,709,545	CRDA	519
	n. 45	MM.35514/35558	£. 19,890,734	Aersicula	1629
Cant.506	n. 4	MM.45279/45282	£. 3,580,000	CRDA	605
	n. 32	MM.45297/45328	£. 41,068,000	Piaggio/F.	3320
	n. 14	MM.45346 / 45459	£. 20.503.028	CRDA	3350
	n. 18	MM.45360 /45377	£. 25,200,000	CRDA	469
	n. 28	MM.45388/45415	£. 41,010,740	Piaggio/F.	3365
	n. 416		£. 437,337,227		

(*) Example MM.23366 with an Alfa 128RC18 motor

AIRCRAFT DIVISION AWARDED IN ORDER

Fighter	n. 1,472
bombers	n. 742
scouts	n. 509
trainers	n. 1,045
transport	n. 157
Total	n. 4,025

Total amount committed in 1941 ordered £. 2,211,387,000.

GENERAL FINANCIAL CONTRACTS AIRCRAFT

Assignee company	*aircraft*	*Amount*	*ordered sublicense*	*total*
1 -AERITALIA	£. 549,784,208 ,	653	-	653
2 -CMASA	£. 74,659,186	12	226	238
3 -CANSA	£. 13,504,118	50	10	60
4 -AVIA	£. 10,658,366	140	-	140
5 -SAIMAN	£. 29,684,644	65	-	65
6 -BREDA	£. 118,482,000	-	256	256
7 -MACCHI	£. 344,288,340	305	-	305
8 -AVIS	£. 5,142,900	-	50	50
9 -OMIR	£. 81,834,518 63,146,000 *	112	84	196
10 -PIAGGIO (F.P.)	£. 36,200,800 128,885,740 *	12	268	280
11 -AGUSTA	£. 14,582,785	-	215	215
12 - SAI	£. 3,526,000 90,091,900 *	12	204	216
13 -CNA	£. 12,356,1.88	-	135	135[601]

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14 -Caproni/Vizzoia	£. 10,443,900	-	115	115
15 - Caproni/Predappio	£. ┌2,470,810 └6851000*	50	10	60
16 -Caproni/Taliedo	£. 58.498.4,64	18	-	18 **
17 -CAB	£. 26,848,454	58	175	233
18 -CRDA	£. 437 337 227	198	-	198
19 -AERSICULA	£. 37,608,034	-	85	85
20 -AUSA	£. 37,691,274	-	46	46
21 -IMAM	£. ┌15,014,945* └88,517,600	26	74	100
22 -NARDI	£. 55,203,370	25	-	25
23- SACA	£. 513,500,023	-	65	65
24 -SIAI/Vergiate	£. 455,527,654	326	-	326
25 -SIAI/Jesi	£. 18,340,740	-	12	12
		2,062	2,030	4,092

*Amount for assignments under license
**Commitment to foreign customers orders (Sweden and Hungary)

GENERAL AIRCRAFT ORDERED BY TYPE

Ba.25	n. 50	Cant.1018/L	n. 10	Ca.309	n. 58
MC.200	n. 465	Cant.501	n. 100	Ca.311	n. 78
Mc.202	n. 300	Cant.506	n. 96	Ca.313	n. 121
CR.42	n. 414	FN.305	n. 208	Ca.314	n. 18
G.50Bis	n. 171	FN.315	n. 50	Ca.164,	n. 50
G.50/B	n. 95	SAI.207	n. 12	FL. 3	n. 21
				Ro.63	n.6
CR.30/B	n. 10	SM.87	n. 4	Ro 41/B	n. 75
BR.20/M	n. 138	SM.79	n. 170	Ro.43	n. 20
C.5	n. 50	SM.84.Bis	n. 202	Sa.200	n. 140
Re.2000	n. 12	SM.82	n. 80	Sa.202	n. 190
Re.2001	n.110	SM.75/T	n. 12	P.108/B	n. 12
Cant1007 Bis	n.210	G.12/T	n. 61	RS.14	n. 12[602]

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GENERAL AIRCRAFT ORDERED BY SPECIALTY

Fighter	*Bomber*	*Reconnaissance*	*School*	*Transportation*
MC.200	SM.79	Ca.309	G.50/B	SM.87
(465)	(170)	(58)	(95)	(4)
Mc.202	SM.84	Ca.311	CR.30 /B	SM.7 5
(300)	(202)	(78)	(10)	(12)
CR.42	Cant.1007	Ca.313	C.5	SM.82
(414)	(210)	(121)	(50)	(80)
G.50Bis	Cant.1018,	Ca.314	FN.305	G.12/T
(171)	(10)	(18)	(208)	(61)
Re.2001	BR.20/M	Cant.501	FN.315	
(110)	(138)	(100)	(50)	
Re.2000	P.108 / B,	Cant.506	Sai.207	
(12)	(12)	(96)	(12)	
		RS.14	Ca.164	
		(12)	(50)	
		Ro.43	FL.3	
		(20)	(215)	
		Ro.63	Ro.41/B	
		(6)	(75)	
			Sa.200	
			(140)	
			Sa.202	
			(190)	
			Ba.25	
			(50)	
1472	742	509	1045	157

Total 4,025.

AIRCRAFT PRODUCTION YEAR 1941

	Aircraft war	Aircraft various	month's Total
January	115	58	173
February	281	128	409
March	273	147	420
April	250	117	367
May	273	96	369
June	243	81	324
July	58	249	191
August	207	35	242
September	205	34	239
October	191	37	228
November	207	18	225
December	215	27	242

Total n. 3487[603]

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ORDERS AVIATION ENGINES YEAR 1941

O.M.I.R.		
A.74RC38	n. 600	£. 134,220,000
P.XIRC40Bis	n. 500	£. 130,287,780
P .VIIC45	n. 100	£. 12,520,000
	n. 1200	£. 277,027,780
ALFA ROMEO		
A.126RC10	n. 70	£. 12,891,536
A.126RC34	n. 610	£. 112,340,528
A.115Bis	n. 206	£. 10,459,000
A.128RC.18	n. 696	£. 135,351,723
RA.1000RC44	n. 1000	£. 342,860,000
A.110	n. 200	£. 10,240,000
	n. 2782	£. 624,144,251
FIAT		
A.82RC.42/8	n. 16	£. 5,877,600
A.80RC41	n. 200	£. 55,641,280
RA. 1050R.C58	n. 1000	£. 411.432.000
A.74RC42	n. 270	£. 65,264,771
A74RC38	n. 1014	£. 242,055,259
	n. 2500	£. 780,270,910
ISOTTA FRASCHINI		
Delta RC40	n. 370	£. 79,741,440
PIAGGIO		
P.XIRC40Bis	n. 600	£. 156,314,771
P.XIIR.C35	n. 520	£. 165,142,340
P.XVIRC60	n. 36	£. 5,254,572
P .XIXRC45	n. 3	£. 1,087,354
P.VIIC.45	n. 200	£. 25,720,000
	n. 1359	£. 353,519,037
O.M. (Brescia)		
A.74RC38	n. 400	£. 89,180,000
C.N.A.		
Alfa D.2	n. 100	£. 8,950,000
CNA/D.4	n. 200	£. 5,060,000
	n. 300	£. 14,010,000

FINANCIAL BREAKDOWN AVIATION MOTORS ORDERS

	committed amount	*engines produced*	*sub-license*	*total*
O.M.I.R.	£. 277,027,780 -		1200	1200
ALFA ROMEO	£. 624,144,251	1860	78	1913
FIAT	£. 780,270,910	1500	-	1500
I.F. (Milano)	£. 79,741,440	370	-	370
PIA:GGIO	£. 353,519,037	1359	-	1359
C.N.A.	£. 14,010,000	200	100	300
O.M. (Brescia)	£. 89,180,000	-	400	400
	£. 2,217,893,418	5289	1778	7067

Engines ordered in 1941 n. 8911

Engines delivered in 1941 n. 7067 (of which n. 78 were DB.601)

Engines presented prototypes and funded n. 20 with an amount of £. 14,132,680 Special Orders for n. 17 engines with a total of £. 7,080,000

Exported engines No. 160 (n. 150 A.135RC32 -Germany) n. 10 P .XIRC40 (Hungary) imported motors n. 227 in the amount .of £. 221,350,000[604]

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ENGINES ORDERS TO GERMANY

MERCEDES BENZ AG.		
DB.60l/A1	n. 200	£. 170,000,000
DB.605/A1	n. 15;	£. 43,750,000
ARGUS GmbH		
A.AS/10	n. 4	£. 1,200,000
BAYRIESCHEN MOTOREN WERKE		
BMW.132	n. 8	£. 6,400,000

Tot. n. 227 engines, amounting to £. 221,350,000

EXPERIMENTAL AIRCRAFT ENGINES

FIAT	
(3) A.38R1C-15/45	£. 2,500,000
(3) A.76RC40	£. 1,500,000
ISOTTA FRASCHINI	
(3) IF.L121RC15	£. 1,550,000
ALFA ROMEO	
(2) A.128RC21	£. 1,100,000
PIAGGIO	
(2) P .XIIRC100	£. 1,300,000
(2) PXXI/2. V	£. 2,100,000
(3) P.XIX / C-15/60	£. 3,232,680
(2) P.XXIRC100,	£. 750,000

SPECIAL ORDERS

FIAT	
A.38RC-15/45	£. 5,000,000
PIAGGIO	
2 PXRC12	£. 430,600
SPICA	
3 Sp.41RC25/45	£. 1,650,000
MERCEDES BENZ AG.	
200 DB.60l/A1	£. 170,000,000
15 DB.605/A1	£. 43,750,000
ARGUS GmbH	
4 Argus AS.10	£. 1,200,000
BAYRIESCHEN MOTOREN WERKE AG.	
8 BMW.132	£. 6,400,000

Engine reproduction rights DB.605/A1 -RM 1,500,000 = £. 27,000,000 (Soc. FIAT)

SUBDIVISION MOTORS PRODUCTION

A.74R: C38 (R1C38)	n. 2014
A.74R: C42	n. 270
P.XIRC40Bis	n. 1100
P.VIIC45	n. 300
A.126RC10 (RC34)	n. 680
A.115Bis	n. 206
A.128RC18 (RC21)	n. 696
RA.1000RC44	n. 78
A.110	n. 200
A.82RC42/S	n. 16
A.80RC41	n. 200
Delta RC40	n. 370
P.XIIR/C35	n. 520
P.XVIRC60	n. 36
A.D/ 2	n. 100
CNA/D.4	n. 200

Engines produced in 1941 a total of n. 7264[605]

The Fiat G. 12 / T assigned in 1941 to SAS Extrapolated from a transport model passengers, proved to be an excellent aircraft for fast transport over large distances (Photo Fiat)

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PROTOTYPE EVALUATION PRESENTED 1941

Ca309/S (Health) MM.11875 C.A.B.
Reworking in sanitary version (2/3 wounded on stretchers) a Ca.309/S previously made by the CAB. Result does not meet the desire of the GS/RA for modest accommodation capacity. Not built in series.
cost £. 430,000

SM.75/M (Military) MM.421 -SIAI/V. (Contract no. 893)
Exemplary modified for the needs of military transport with compartment load without particular installation. Prototype for SIAI/Jesi.
cost £. 1,528,176

SM.75/TP.-MM.440 (then I-AMED) SIAI/V. (Contract no. 896)
Aircraft equipped to transport Celebrities by the Viceroy of Ethiopia Amedeo of Aosta. Modified with stabilizers and more special flight instrument equipment.
cost £. 2,791,860

SM.84/S (Special) MM. Unknown -SIAI/V. (Contract no. 907)
Exemplary modified for personal transport and powered by A. 128RC18 engines of 860 HP. then enhanced for possible sale by the Spanish Government.
cost £. 966,089

SAIMAN-SA.205-MM.389/390/391-SAIMAN Lido of Roma
Biplane trainer with powerful engine and increased speed from the Sa.200. Not built in series.
cost £. 215,000

Ca.312-MM.401 (former Ca.310 airframe) C.A.B.
Twin-engine reconnaissance with P.XVIRC35 engines of 550 HP. Built in series for R.A. and for foreign air forces.
cost £. 486,000

Ca.313/S (Torpedo modified) MM.402 –Caproni-Taliedo
Bomber- former scout with I.F. Delta RC35 engines of 700 HP. built in small series for aerial torpedoing and then passed to training at N.O.S. after some modifications for the new use.
cost £. 600,000

Cant. Z.1018/L (Wood) C.R.D.A. *M.M.467*
Twin-engine bomber with XIIRC35 engines if 1350 HP. In the CSA assessment after the tests with Alfa 135RC32 engines of 1350 HP. Built in pre-trial.
cost £. 3,400,000

SM.7 /RTMM.41/41-SIAI/V.
Three-engined transport-connections for long range flights for the "G" mission (Japan) and named R.T. (Rome-Tokyo) equipped with special tools and equipment and increased fuel load capacity.
cost £. 2,800,000

P.M.1/C.N.A.-MM.417 - COMPAGNIA NATIONAL AVIATION – Rome
Touring Aircraft evaluated for trainer first period with the engine CNA / DIV of 60 HP. replacing Ba.25-Ro.41, Ca.164, Sa.200, FL.3. Ordered pre-trial.
cost £.160,000

Ca.603-MM.429/430 -CAPRONI- *Predappio*
Biplane aircraft for aerobatics training with Alfa 115 engine of 185 HP. Not ordered in series for a number of piloting difficulties.
cost £. 794,084

Ro.58-MM.431/432 -I.M.A.M.
Metal twin-engine heavy fighter-fighter with DB.601/A engines of 1175 HP. MG.151 3/20 + 1 Mg. 12.7. Not reproduced in series.
cost £. 3,500,000

Macchi MC.201-MM.436/437 -MACCHI
Single-engine fighter made of metal cell the MC.200 modified for installation of Fiat A. 76RC40 engine of 1000 HP. Not ordered in series as it was technically outdated at the time of presentation.
cost £. 940,000

Sai.107-MM.441 -S.A.I.
Single-engine monoplane fighter in wooden construction with motor I.F. RC35 range from 540 HP. retractable landing gear. Not built in series.
cost £.189,000[606]

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Re.200l/D (Delta) MM.9920 -O.M.I.R.
Single-engine monoplane fighter metal extrapolated from Re.2001 but with I.F. Delta RC16/48 engine of 840 HP. Not built in series.

cost £. 1,350,000

Sai.207-MM.442/443 -S.A.I.
Single-engine monoplane fighter in wooden construction with I.F. Delta RC40 motor of 750 HP. Built in pre-trial.

cost £. 280,000

Fiat G.50/V (Fast) -MM.358l –AERITALIA
Single-engine metallic monoplane fighter with DB.601 /A engine of 1175 HP. extrapolated from a standard specimen with radial engine and adapted to in-line engine for experimental evaluations. Not built in series.

cost £. 1,020,000

AL.12/P-MM.508/509 -AERONAUTIICA LOMBARD
heavy load Glider with high-wing and rotary bow on vertical pin designed to transport to N.A. and airborne operations. not built in series.

cost £. 2,460,000

Piaggio P.133/B-MM.552 -PIAGGIO-Finale Ligure
Four-engine long-range bomber (called P.108/Bis) with P.XVRC60 / V2 engine of 1700 HP. Not built in series.

cost £. 5,100,000 (without engines)

AUSA-MB.902-MM.509 -AERONAUTICA UMBRA S.A.
Twin-engine metal fighter with I.F.L.180 engines then replaced with DB.605/A. designed by Capt. Bellomo had a 6 MG armament. 151/20. Not built in series.

cost £. 3,180,000

Bestetti C.3-MM.510 –Arcore
Twin engined touring adapted for advanced multi-engine training. Wooden construction, Alta Romeo 111 engines of 135 HP. Not reproduced in series.

cost £. 969 800

AVIA-LM.5l-MM.511 -AVIA-Vercelli
Assault Glider in wooden construction with high wing for airborne operations. Not built in Series.

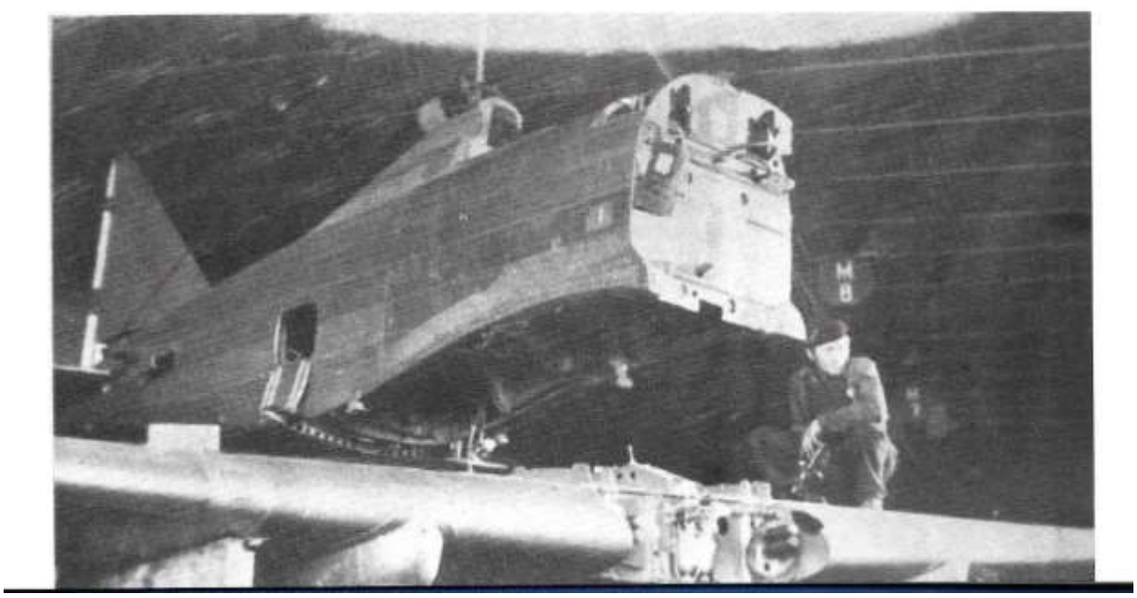
cost £. 920,000

JOB SUMMARY 1941

Aircraft produced in 1941	n. 3487
Aircraft prototypes presented	n. 22
Exported aircraft	n. 207

(Hungary n., 63 -24 Re.2000 - Ca.135Bis)
(Sweden n. 30 Re.2000 - 90 Ca.313)[607]

Assembly hall of the Re. 2001 at the OMIR workshops of the most impressive and modern Italian aeronautical industry. You notice the trunk of the fuselage shell and the central connection of the wings.



607

Total production aircraft	n. 3696
Engines produced in 1941	n. 7264

* * *

Compared to the production recorded in 1940 there had been an increase of only 240 aircraft more, a result certainly not satisfactory in the 2nd year of the war that denoted an irrational distribution of orders and a minor increase in production.

The further shift of orders had been addressed to the Aeritalia which benefited from a load of 951 aircraft divided between the three associated companies. The parent company had received orders for 653 copies; they followed in descending order of assignments: the SIAI/Vergiate with 326 aircraft, Macchi, 305, 197 with CRDA and other smaller companies.

Among the various companies that produced under license, the greatest burden of orders was assigned to Piaggio of Finale Ligure 268 aircraft, with 256 to Breda, 226 to CMASA, 215 to Agusta and 204 with SAI.

Was healed the plight of Breda remained deprived of their models to be built, after the termination of Ba.88 production and the lack of suitable projects to reinstate the vacuum created in company of Sesto S. Giovanni, who possessed vast and modern plants and many skilled workers.

The fighter aircraft assigned for production in the highest number of specimens was in 1941 the MC.200 with 465 units, followed by CR.42 with 414, the new MC.202 with 300, for the G.50Bis with 171 and the Re.2001 with 110 specimens. Among the bombers then, there was the prerogative of the highest for Cant.l007Bis with 210 units, the SM.84 in normal and Bis version with 202, the old SM.79 with 170 and 138 BR.20/M.

In land scouts first place in the ranking was the Ca.313 with 121 aircraft ordered later in maritime reconnaissance aircraft the Cant.501 with 100 specimens and Cant.506 with 96 while in the school aircraft the FL.3 reached the considerable number of 215 ordered units, followed by the F. 305 at 208, with 190 for the Sa.202 and Sa.200 with 140.

Finally among the transport the SM.82 stood out with 80 aircraft: committed even if that number proved inadequate to the needs of the SAS.

The financial situation also saw head Aeritalia with 549 million in turnover followed by the SIAI with 455, the Cantieri dell'Adriatico with 437, Macchi with 344 million in orders.

Very low financial resulted for the allocation for the Caproni Group (5 associated companies) less than 280 million in sales including OMIR who had committed for a total of 144 million of which just over 50 percent for company production of designing aircraft, but this financial deficiency resulted offset by buildings on behalf of foreign clients for about 240 airplanes with a turnover of 330 million lire.

But it had a great influence in the production of the OMIR the annulment of two orders for 150 Re.2001 respectively assigned to establishments Caproni Taliedo and Predappio (160 million in orders) and the Breda-Aviation that an order had also lost the 200 Re.2001 partly offset by the allocation of 100 MC.202 to ensure continuity of the first corporate order.

For certain establishments production capacity had been used in small amount of 50% of the potential (Caproni, Piaggio, Breda, OMIR, AVIS) with the consequence of creating a worrying situation of industrial stagnation -both for lack of their business projects, both for organizational dysfunction DGCA-which had not promptly evaluated the short-productive decadence time without assigning, adequate manufacturing counterparts with engines licensed and increased demand, objectively considering the refusal to accept the Re.2000 for special preventions, the reduction of orders of the Re.2001 due to certain technical limitations, the Ba.88 ceased production and other obsolete models that reduced to 10 firms, which continued to produce on their projects increasing to 15 instead they built under license, some of which such as Piaggio and Finale; SAI worked to the extent of 94% of licensees buildings, the IMAM 75%, Breda and Caproni-Vizzola 100%.

Other considerations in the range of products aircraft in 1941, concerned the high number of CR.42 still in the processing line over 400 ranked, only 15% lower than the MC.200 which at that time could be considered as the most technically valid and efficient combat ready Italian Air Force fighter, however, the higher number of CR.42 of 26% to the new Mc.202 fighter assigned into production during the year.[608]

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Aviation industry workers returning to work after the break of the meal. In 1941 more than 140,000 workers were employed by the Italian Air Force, (cellule motors)

It was somewhat difficult to justify the continued of production of the now anachronistic biplane, but probably even that far-fetched mystery will remain tenaciously wrapped between the incomprehensible pages of Italian war notwithstanding tenacious efforts of researchers and scholars to find plausible reasons for his presence, in the technological evolution constellation expressed by the air war in World War II.

Equally unjustified even if to a lesser extent, resulted the production of G.50Bis, technically outdated and of poor technical and war quality, but this aspect could probably be accepted by the need to replenish with the new planes in the 1st line of the Fighter Specialty not sufficiently compensated for by the MC.200 influx, as well as by insufficient production at Pomigliano Alfa of the RA.1000 motor (DB.601/Al) than the Fiat A.74R.C38.

In the area of the bombing instead aroused serious concern the high number of SM.84 ordered (over 300 units), despite the findings in training, in periods of transition and in those operational equally negative even after brief stay of three-engine SIAI in units involved, to the point that, as much as possible (sic) stop the bureaucracy process of orders or cancel them with other, it was necessary to complete the entire ordering and delivering the last vestiges to the units to simultaneously start early striking off the first units delivered in 1941: a poor choice, a negative finding, a little-considered decision that will put the 1st line Bomber in crisis between 1942-43.

As of 31/12/1941, after 18 months of tough war fought on 8 -different sectors, the consistency of the Italian Air Force flight material presented in this way:

BOMBING

types in the line	10-6-140	Increase	Decreases	Consistency 12/31/1941
Cant.1007Bis	83	271	67	287
SM.79	635	297	430	502
SM.84	-	146	17	129
BR.20/M	226	204	89	341
P .108/B	-	10	1	9
Ju.87	-	100	59	41
SM.82/B	12	10	10	12
Total	956	1038	673	1321[609]

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BOMBING

War losses and stricken from the 1st line

aircraft type	*06/10/1940*	*Increase*	*Decreases*	*Consistency 12/31/1941*
SM.81	304	-	140	164
Cant.1007	65	-	36	29
SM.85	32	-	32	-
Ca.133	246	-	176	70
Cant.506/B	97	100	65	132
Total	744	100	449	395

For bombers stricken from the 1st line there had been several destinations for employment changes and transformations: a former transport bombers or training aircraft for specialty schools or complementary groups, former maritime bombers for maritime reconnaissance (see Cant.506/B).

Overall, in the face of a consistency to 06/10/1940 1700 bombers had had an increase of 1138 new specimens and a decrease for different causes (war, accidents, stricken, etc.) of 1068 units. A modest increase that had just offset the losses of the 1st line.

FIGHTER/ASSAULT/COMBAT

Type in line	*06/10/1940*	*Increase*	*Decreases*	*Consistency 12/31/1941*
CR.42	328	681	497	512
MC.200	143	743	238	648
G.50 (Bis)	110	499	169	440
Re.2000	-	26	10	16
MC.202	-	145	26	119
Re.2001	-	39	-	39
Ro.44	30	-	5	25
F.5	12	2	-	14
Total	623	2135	945	1813
War losses and stricken from the 1st line				
Ba.88	110	27	45	92
Ba.65	164	-	122	42
CR.32	372	6	123	255
Total	646	33	290	389

For fighter-bombers stricken from the 1st line there had been several destinations: assignment to specialty schools and complementary groups, set aside for technical changes for different use destination as such the Ba.88 and the residue Ba. 65.

In the face of an overall consistency to 06/10/1940 of 1269 aircraft, had had an increase for new construction of 2,168 and a loss of units for war, accident and radiation of 1235 specimens. There had been a positive increase in the line of about 300% to show the importance of fighters with respect to the bombers, a sharp reversal of strategic trends and tactics as well as production.

A choice before the war that had not stood long in the relentless scrutiny of the modern air war".[610]

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OBSERVATION AND RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT

Type in line	*06/10/1940*	*Increase*	*Decreases*	*Consistency 12/31/1941*
Ro.37	322	-	146	176
Ca.309 "Ghibli"	68	40	46	62
Ca.311	140	177	46	271
Ca.312	-	25	-	25
Ca.313	3	136	9	130
CR.25	-	10	1	9
	533	388	248	673
War losses and stricken from the 1st line				
Ca.310	71	34	71	34

The twin-engine Ca.310 downgraded from the assault/light bombing to armed reconnaissance was during 1941 further declassified and assigned to specialty schools.

MARITIME RECONNAISSANCE.

Type in line	*06/10/1940*	*Increase*	*Decreases*	*Consistency 12/31/1941*
Cant.501	203	143	102	244
Cant.506	26	109	12	123
RS.14	1	11	1	11
Ca.316	-	13	-	13
Ro.43	107	61	37	131
	337	337	152	522

The flight material of R.N. had not suffered declassifications.

GENERAL SUMMARY

	06/10/1940	*Increase*	*Decreases*	*Consistency 12/31/1941*
Bomber	956	1038	673	1321
Fighter	623	2135	945	1813
Aerial observation	533	388	248	673
Maritime reconnaissance	337	337	152	522
total	2449	3898	2018	4329

WAR LOSTS AND STRICKEN FROM THE 1st LINE

	06/10/1940	*Increase*	*Decreases*	*Consistency 12/31/1941*
Bomber	744	100	449	395
Fighter/Assault	646	33	290	389[611]

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Aerial observation	71	34	71	34
Maritime reconnaissance	-	-	-	-
Total	1461	167	810	818
Grand Total	3910	4065	2828	5147

CONSIDERATIONS

The overall situation of the 1st line flight material, as shown by the previous statistical presentation, had undergone some important variations and alterations in use during the first 18 months of war in the skies, mercilessly eliminating aircraft unsuitable for supporting the war role such as the SM.85, Ba.88 and Ca.310, reducing to more congenial roles aircraft such as the Ca.133 and SM.81 for bombing, CR.32 for hunting, more logically transforming former bombers such as the SM.81 and the Cant. 506/B into transport and maritime reconnaissance aircraft.

The introduction of new models into the 1st line had been multifaceted as far as aircraft produced were concerned, discontinuous as far as performance and results were concerned since it alternated successful models such as the MC.202 with aircraft that were not perfectly accepted such as the SM.84 and P.108/B.

To considerable increases in the proportion established for fighters, there were modest improvements for maritime reconnaissance - aerial observation in the order of 25-30%, while the average increase of flight material of the 1st line was passed to 65% of potential established on 1 June 1940 and could be considered a good result, both for the increase recorded for the qualitative selection for the influx of new aircraft.

But the losses had been strong for war causes even though there was a positive gap between new buildings and losses of 25%, sufficient margin but not satisfactory to ensure continuity of service and an acceptable quantitative level.

Among the nearly 3,000 aircraft have been lost for various reasons, were to be counted a good 497 CR.42, largely destroyed between Libya (about 300 aircraft) and E.A. (91 aircraft), 430 three-engined SM.79, 170 Ca.133 and 140 SM.81, 90 BR.20 and 59 Ju.87 – the latter equal to 60% of the availability of Stukas to the RA and still 240 MC.200, 170 G.50, 120 Ba.65, 150 Ro.37, over a hundred Cant.501 and 65 Cant.506. The reconstruction of aircraft coming from the recovery and reclaimed materials and parts taken from planes (largely recovered in N.A., had resulted in the return to service of 155 airplanes lost in value from the aeronautical heritage and fortunately reinstated thanks to the efforts and sacrifices of the SRAM and militarized workshops of Libya, and between them made sure: 59 CR.42, 29 SM.79, 13 G.50, 12 MC.200, 9 CR.32, 12 Ro.37, an excellent result in general economics of war!

The higher index of new entries belonged to Macchi C.200 with 743 aircraft, followed by CR.42 with 681, with 499 G.50 and among the bombers of the old but still valid SM.79 with 297 specimens, by the Cant. 1007 Bis with 271, BR.20 with 203 and SM.84 with 146 units. Among the scouts included 177 Ca.311, 136 Ca.313, 143 Cant.501 and 100 Cant.506; more modest attendance of other aircraft such as the Ro.43 with 61 specimens.

The schools of specialty: Fighters, Bombing, Observation had "theoretically" received over 400 substandard aircraft but many of these aircraft and in particular the Ba.88 and Ba.65 with about 120 specimens, had to be reconverted with long and technically challenging improvement works and they will not find any useful application, even in teaching, in all the remaining course of the conflict.

As a curiosity we note that in June 1940 there were at least 34 different models of aircraft and 4 prototypes, and in December 1941 had been downgraded from the 1st line 8 models between Bombers and Fighters, but there were still a number of models in production that made dispersive and irrational the policy of unifying a few but efficient models, the aircraft of the different specialties of the 1st line.

The distribution in the schools of specialties of the former aircraft of the 1st line, was as follows:[612]

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Bombing	n. 151
Hunt- Assault	n. 229
Terrestrial Observation Aircraft	n. 21
Maritime reconnaissance	n. 34
Naval Forces Flight units.	n. 14
Total	n. 449

From the total of 1st line aircraft charge as of 12/31/1941, they were repaired by SRAM and civil companies no. 930 aircraft of which about 700 between bombers and fighters, while another 733 were ready to collect by SRAM and civil workshops after repairs type of R.S. or R.D.; the total efficient aircraft and war ready ascended to 1,493 copies and included 423 bombers, 657 fighters, 238 ground and 149 maritime reconnaissance aircraft plus 26 naval floatplanes: about 30% of the total.

AIRCRAFT PROVIDED FOR TECHNICAL TRANSFORMATION OR IN LINE TO BE STRICKEN
(As of 12/31/1941)

Transformation			*Stricken*	
SM.81	n. 165	(From BT to T)	SM.85	n. 30
Ba.88	n. 40	(level to dive)	Ba.65	n. 72
Ba.65	n. 20	(adapted plunge flight)	Ba.88	n. 45
Cant.506	n. 109	(from BM. MR.)	Total	n. 147
Re.2000	n. 6	(from CT. to GA.)		
SM.79	n. 29	(adapted to BT)		
CR.42	n. 59	(adapted to CT)		
MC.200	n. 12	(adapted to CT)		
G .50	n. 13	(adapted to CT)		
CR.32	n. 164	(from CT adapted to CT.)		
Ro.44	n. 5	(from CM. adapted to Naval Forces)		
Ro.37	n. 12	(adapted to O.A.T.)		
Ca.310	n. 97	(adapted to BT./O.A.T.)		
Ca.311	n. 5	(adapted to O.A.T.)		
Ca.309	n. 5	(adapted to A.P.C.)		
Cant.501	n. 2	(adapted to RM)		
Ro.43	n. 2	(adapted to Naval Forces.)		
Cant.1007	n. 29	(adapted to BT).		
Total	n. 774			

Most of substandard aircraft is assigned to the Specialty Schools. The changes mainly concern SM.81 (Transport) and Cant.506 (Maritime Reconnaissance)

PERSONAL LOSS OF THE R.A. TO 12/31/1941

Deceased	**n. 971**
Missing	**n. 1,842**
Prisoners	**n. 4,757**
Interned	**n. 54**
Total	**n. 7,624**[613]

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LOSS OF S.A.S. AIRCRAFT AND STAFF

	Trips	Deceased	Missing	Aircraft lost
East Africa	330	-	12	13
North Africa	12,166	15	18	21
French N.A.	3	355	-	2
Albania	8691	3	-	5
Aegean	601	-	-	-
Atlantic route	180	-	6	2
European lines	911	-	-	-
National lines	1,412	-	7	2
Iraq	16	-	-	-
C.S.I.R.	34	2	-	1
Total	24,696	23	43	46

SITUATION OF THE R.A. FORCES IN SERVICE (12/31/1941)

Combat aircraft (fighters, bombers, land / maritime reconnaissance)		n. 4,402
Auxiliary aircraft (transport, air passengers, prototypes, aircraft VIP)		n. 242
School aircraft (single-engine, multi-engine, different)		n. 2,402
RUNA/travel Aircraft (civil single engine state, private)		n. 640
	Total	n. 7,686

WAR ACTIVITIES OF THE ITALIAN AIR FORCE
(Air Fleet- Army: Marinavia- Esercitavia-SAS)
Period 06/10/1940 – 12/31/1941

Acts of war carried out	n. 70,050
Number of bombs dropped	n. 344,614
Flight hours	n. 298,557
Enemy equipment destroyed in combat	n. 1,280
Enemy aircraft destroyed on the ground	n. 449
Enemy aircraft destroyed by the A/A defense	n. 784
Aircraft probably destroyed	n. 809
Warships sunk or rendered unusable	n. 34
Warships damaged	n. 151
Merchant ships sunk or rendered unusable	n. 72
Merchant ships damaged	n. 81
Transport journeys made	n. 37,452
Km flown	n. 28,810,414
Persons transported	n. 345,975
Material conveyed	23,726,419 tons

1941 - ITALIAN MARITIME ACTIVITIES

Naval convoys to Libya	n. 143
Naval convoys from Libya	n. 110
Unit-trip cargo ships	n. 338
Unit-military ships traveling	n. 128
Unit-trip escort warships	n. 344
Gross tonnage of merchant shipping employed	n. 1,954,975
TSL lost merchant ships	n. 247,417
Personnel transported	n. 157,221
Staff, lost at sea	n. 14,168
Military cargo transported	1,016,442 tons.

(853,193 tons arrive at destination) 48,728 of those tons for R.A.[614]

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1941 ENEMY AIR-NAVAL ACTIVITIES.

Offensive activities with naval units against the national territory	n. 29
Areas actions against Italy and Libya -Albania -Aegean	n. 672
Tripoli -incursioni	n. 159
Tobruk	n. 124
Catania	n. 55
Naples and Augusta	n. 34
Brindisi	n. 27
Taranto	n. 13
Genoa and Messina	n. 12
Trapani	n. 10
Valona	n. 41

Military ships lost for war causes No. 79, surface ships, and n. 18 submarines (7 cruisers, 15 DD., 14 torpedo boats, 7 MAS/MS for a total of TSL. 143,000.

Torpedoes launched by R.M. n. 1087, depth charges n. 6925, barrages of mines to number of 6022 devices.

Hospital ships lost in 1941: "*California," "Orlando," "Po", "San Giusto", " Tevere ", “Ramb IV*."

1941 - ACTIVITIES OF THR R.A.F. AIR FORCE

To 11/10/1941 the location and evaluation of the British Force Air news according reports from the S.I.A. ascended it to more than 7,500 aircraft that were distributed as follows:

UK	n. 4,000
Africa West Coast	n. 70
(Gold Coast, Ivory Coast, Nigeria)	
East Africa	n. 150
(Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan)	
Aden	n. 50
Egypt	n. 1,300
Malta	n. 150
Palestine	n. 250
Iraq	n. 250
India	n. 250
Burma	n. 50
Singapore	n. 300
Australia	n. 300
New Zealand	n. 150[615]

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